

Bill MacFarland

Bill MacFarland played junior hockey with his hometown Toronto Marlboros in the early 1950s. Instead of making the move to professional or high level amateur hockey when his junior eligibility expired, he took an unusual step for a promising young hockey player and enrolled at the University of Michigan in 1952. He skated three seasons with the Wolverines, winning two NCAA Championships (1955 and 1956) and being named to the 1955 NCAA Frozen Four All-Tournament Team.

College hockey was not highly regarded in the 1950s, and MacFarland was one of only two college players to be signed by a professional team when he graduated in 1956 (the other was Ken Yackel of the University of Minnesota). The Detroit Red Wings took a chance on the big forward and he began his professional hockey career with the Edmonton Flyers of the WHL in 1956-57. After a solid rookie season, he was transferred to the Seattle Americans by Detroit to fill the hole left by the departure of Guyle Fielder, the American's all-star center who made the Red Wings roster out of training camp in the fall of 1957. Fielder didn't stick in the NHL and returned to the Americans early in the season, but Detroit allowed MacFarland to remain in Seattle where he went on to an excellent nine-season career with the Americans and Totems.

In 1958-59 MacFarland's 35 goals led the high-scoring Totems, and his 17 points in the playoffs helped them to their first WHL Championship. The following season he teamed up with line mates Rudy Filion and Marc Boileau to form the highest scoring line in the league, with the trio picking up 103 goals between them. His goal totals continued to climb every season, culminating with the 1961-62 campaign in which he lit the lamp 46 times to lead the league and earn MVP honors. Always a prolific scorer, MacFarland's 299 career goals in a Seattle uniform are the third most all-time by any player from any era. He also ranks in the top ten all-time among Seattle players in games played (6th – 626), assists (4th – 344), and points (3rd – 643). He also performed at a high level during the playoffs, where he ranks second all-time in goals (25), assists (43) and points (68).

MacFarland's contributions to hockey weren't limited to his on-ice performance. After earning his law degree and being admitted to the Washington State Bar Association

in 1964, he became heavily involved in player's rights issues and helped to create a league-sponsored pension fund for WHL players, the first of its kind in minor league sports.

Following his retirement as a player in the spring of 1966, MacFarland took over the vacant coaching job in Seattle and led the Totems to back-to-back WHL Championships in his first two seasons behind the bench (1967 and 1968). He remained with the organization as coach, general manager and part owner through the end of the 1969-70 season, finishing with a lifetime 137-121-33 coaching record. After concentrating on his law career for a few years, he returned to hockey as the president of the WHL from 1972-74. One of the greatest successes during his tenure was the orchestration of two exhibition series between the world champion hockey team from Russia and WHL teams. The Russians were 7-1 against the WHL, with their only loss coming at the hands of the Seattle Totems on January 5, 1974.

With the demise of the WHL in 1974 and the folding of the Totems franchise in 1975, there were no longer any hockey opportunities available in Seattle. MacFarland relocated to Phoenix, where he became one of the owners of the Phoenix Roadrunners of the World Hockey Association as well as president of the WHA from 1975-77. In the early 1990s MacFarland was heavily involved in the quest to bring an NHL expansion team to Seattle, an attempt that eventually failed when the holder of the Seattle expansion franchise application backed out at the last moment.

Despite never having played a game in the NHL, Bill MacFarland had tremendous success at every level of hockey and his contributions to the game in Seattle as a player, coach, owner and league executive played an important role in the era of the game's greatest success in our region.

Jeff Obermeyer is a 13-year season ticket holder with the Thunderbirds. His new book, "Hockey in Seattle", chronicles the history of hockey in Seattle from 1915 to the present day. It is available at the souvenir stands or through his website at <http://www.seattlehockey.net>.

