

Seattle's First Hockey Championship

Hockey first came to Seattle in the fall of 1915 when the Pacific Coast Hockey Association (PCHA) created a new franchise for the city. Dubbed the Metropolitans (known locally as the Mets), the nucleus of the new team was comprised of former members of the Toronto Blueshirts of the rival NHA who jumped their contracts to come out west. The addition of the Mets made the PCHA a four-team circuit, with other clubs in Vancouver, Victoria and Portland.

After a respectable 9-9 inaugural season, expectations in Seattle were high going into the 1916-17 campaign. The Mets staggered out of the gate, losing three of their first four games. They clawed their way back to .500, then won seven of their next eight to take a commanding lead in the standings, eventually finishing in first with a 16-8 record. The PCHA did not have a playoff system in place, so the Mets were the league champs by virtue of their regular season record. By winning the title they also earned the right to host the champions of the NHA in a best-of-five series for hockey's greatest trophy, the Stanley Cup.

The Montreal Canadiens were crowned champs of the NHA and they made the long trek west by train. Their roster was impressive and included four future Hall-of-Famers, including goaltender Georges Vezina as well as the best hockey player in the world at the time, Newsy Lalonde. The Candiens arrived in Seattle on the evening of March 16, and despite the tired legs they surprised everyone by knocking off the Mets by a score of 8-4 in the series opener the following night. The lone bright spot for Seattle was the play of Bernie Morris, who picked up a hat trick in the loss.

The Mets bounced back in the second game on March 20, dominating Montreal and earning a 6-1 win to even the series. It was a rough night with a number of fights and the eventual ejection of Lalonde, who speared the referee in the third period to earn himself a \$25 fine. The third game was a close affair, and the Mets clung to a 1-0 lead going into the third period until Bernie Morris scored a pair of goals to lead his club to a 4-1 win. For Morris it was his second hat trick of the series, increasing his goal count to eight. It was another physical game, and Montreal manager George Kennedy protested the result due to poor officiating. He may have had a point – Harry Mummery had been

whistled off with a 10-minute misconduct late in the second period, and the referee did not let the Canadiens to put a replacement player on the ice as was allowed in the rules. Montreal had to play shorthanded for the duration of the penalty, during which the Mets scored three goals. Regardless, the protest was turned down by PCHA president Frank Patrick and Seattle held a two-games-to-one lead in the series.

The teams clashed again on March 26 and Bernie Morris opened the scoring for Seattle with a goal in the first. He followed it up with two goals in the second and three more in the third, giving him six on the evening and a total of 14 for the series. The Mets ran away with the contest, beating Montreal 9-1 to take the series and become the first U.S.-based team to win the Stanley Cup. Unfortunately the Canadiens hadn't brought the trophy with them, and it was another three months before it finally arrived at its new home in Seattle. After all of the expenses had been paid, the winner's share of the receipts totaled a paltry \$180 per player (the loser's share was only \$120 each).

The Mets went on to play for the Cup again in 1919 and 1920, but were never again successful in earning hockey's highest honor.

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>.