

John Hanna

John Hanna was already a 13-year hockey veteran when he arrived in Seattle for the 1968-69 WHL season, a career that included parts of five seasons in the NHL and another seven with Quebec of the AHL. Despite getting a late start at hockey (he didn't learn to skate until he was 13-years-old) the Sydney, Nova Scotia native quickly established himself as a top defensive prospect and by the 1958-59 season he was in the NHL with the New York Rangers.

The Philadelphia Flyers traded Hanna (as well as Art Stratton) to Seattle in 1968 to complete a deal that sent the rights to Totem forward Earl Heiskala to the Flyers. Though never known as a goal-scoring threat, he got off to a quick start with a goal in his second game with Seattle and never looked back. By the end of the season he had tied the WHL record for goals by a defenseman with 25. Hanna credited his success to increased ice time on the power play, where he scored almost half of his goals. He was not only awarded the Laycoe Cup as the league's top defenseman and named a first team all-star, but also earned league MVP honors for his efforts. Unfortunately the team was not as successful, finishing in fourth and being swept in the first round of the playoffs.

Hanna's offensive production dropped off the following season with only nine goals, though his 42 points were the most by a Totems' defenseman. Many of the players had "off years" that season, and Seattle finished under .500 for the first time since 1963-64 and once again suffered defeat in the first round of the playoffs. Little did anyone know at the time, but the spring of 1970 was the last time the Totems would make it to the postseason.

In 1970-71 Hanna was back to his old form, establishing himself as one of the Totems' top offensive threats. His 20 goals were the second most on the team behind the 27 of Gary Veneruzzo, and his 60 points were tied for the top mark on the team. John's high rank on the team statistics was not only indicative of his skill, but also the ineptness of a Seattle offense that was the second worst in the league. As a result the club suffered a second straight losing season and finished out of the playoffs. Though the team struggled, Hanna's skills were recognized throughout the league and he earned his second Laycoe Cup and a spot as a first team all-star.

The 1971-72 season was the lowest point for the Totems franchise, and things weren't much different for their star defenseman. Following an opening night win the club lost the next seven straight. Shortly thereafter they also lost the services of Hanna, who was forced to undergo hernia surgery that kept him out of the lineup for six weeks. Without their top defensemen the Totems went on an incredible 18-game losing streak to drop their record to 2-25-0 before the Christmas break. They eventually finished the season a dismal 12-53-7, giving them the worst winning percentage in WHL history. Hanna was only able to play 36 games and contributed a meager five goals and 15 points to the cause. He left Seattle for the allure of the World Hockey Association after that season, playing in 66 games with Cleveland in 1972-73.

Hanna had his greatest offensive success during his four seasons with Seattle. He never scored more than nine goals in a season either before or after his time with the Totems, yet broke the 20 goal mark twice with the club. He remains the only Seattle defenseman ever to lead his team in scoring and is one of only two Totems to ever win the Laycoe Cup as the league's top defenseman (the other was Dave Dunn in 1972-73). Following his playing days Hanna achieved notoriety of a different sort when he, along with a number of other Canadian-born players, filed suit against the United States government seeking refunds for income taxes paid while the players were signed with U.S. based teams. Specifically the players felt they shouldn't be taxed for salary earned while they were either playing games in Canada or training during the off-season. They lost their suit and finally exhausted all of their appeals in 1999.

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>.