

The Seattle/Portland Rivalry

The 2004-05 season marks the 28th consecutive season of the rivalry between the Seattle Thunderbirds and Portland Winter Hawks. The teams have met in a number of memorable battles over the years, and fans on both sides look forward to the meetings. Twenty-eight seasons makes for a long history, but did you know that the Seattle/Portland hockey rivalry dates all the way back to 1915 and that the two cities actually have a 74 year legacy of battles on the ice?

The first hockey game between teams from the two cities took place in Seattle on December 14, 1915 when the Portland Rosebuds traveled north to face the Metropolitans in an early season PCHA match-up. A four-goal third period gave the Mets the win by a score of 4-2, though the Rosebuds returned the favor three nights later by winning the first meeting of the two clubs in Portland 5-2.

The Rosebuds folded following the 1917-18 season, and Portland didn't have a professional team again until they joined the Seattle Eskimos in the newly formed PCHL in the fall of 1928. In the spring of 1929 the clubs met in the playoffs, the first of 15 postseason clashes between the two cities. Seattle took the two game, total goal series, winning both games and outscoring the Buckaroos 3-1.

Like most great sports rivalries, Seattle and Portland have had their share of fireworks. In the spring of 1931 Portland manager (and former Seattle Metropolitan) Bobby Rowe began a war of words in the press, stating that if the Eskimos continued with their rough play he was going to come out of retirement and suit up for his club to show Seattle what rough hockey was really like. Eskimo manager Lloyd Turner indicated that he would be glad to do the same (mind you, he hadn't played in a game since 1907!) and the pair could settle matters on the ice. Fortunately cooler heads prevailed, and the much anticipated meeting never took place. That's not to say that two clubs never battled it out - on February 22, 1939 the Sea Hawks and Buckaroos met in what was described as "the roughest hockey game in a decade in the Pacific Northwest" by the *Seattle Times*, enlivened by a number of fights and a pair of bench-clearing brawls.

Portland was without professional hockey from 1951-60 until the expansion Buckaroos joined the WHL for the 1960-61 season. They immediately made their presence felt, winning the league title in their first season by defeating the Totems in the

finals, renewing the rivalry that became one of the most intense in the league. While both franchises were very successful, they only met in the postseason three times during the 14 seasons they competed in the WHL. Two of those meetings were in the league finals – in 1961 when Portland earned the title and again in 1968 when the Totems won their second consecutive WHL championship. The largest crowd to ever attend a hockey game in Seattle was during this era, when 13,563 fans packed the Coliseum on January 23, 1965 to see the Totems fall to the Buckaroos in overtime by a score of 5-4.

The professional WHL folded in 1974, but Seattle and Portland quickly renewed their rivalry in 1977 in the junior WHL. The Thunderbirds and Winter Hawks have met in the playoffs seven times during the 27 seasons they have competed in the league with Portland holding the advantage, winning five of those series. The most recent postseason meeting between the two clubs was in 2002 when the Thunderbirds upset the U.S. Division champs four games to three, winning the deciding seventh game on the road in Portland.

The “I-5 Rivalry” between Seattle and Portland remains one of the most popular in the WHL. Of the 10 largest crowds in WHL history, seven of them were for games between the Thunderbird and Winter Hawks including a league record 19,103 who watched the clubs battle to a 6-6 tie in Portland on March 15, 1997.

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>.