

Rudy Filion

Rudy Filion first came to the west coast as an amateur, playing for the Tacoma Rockets of the Pacific Coast Hockey League (PCHL) in 1947-48. The league went professional the following season, and the Tacoma franchise went out of business. Frank Dotten, owner of the Seattle Ironmen, signed the 21-year-old Cornwall, Ontario native to a professional contract and in 1948-49 Filion played in his first of 14 seasons in a Seattle uniform. He quickly established himself as an offensive threat at center, leading the Ironmen in scoring during his first season with 37 goals and 75 points.

The signing of Filion was the first step in re-establishing hockey respectability in Seattle, a slow building process that finally culminated with a WHL championship in 1959. Along the way there were two ownership changes in a four year period, the suspension of the franchise for the entire 1954-55 season (during which Filion did not play), and a run of five consecutive sub-.500 seasons. Despite the turmoil, Rudy kept churning out points as the other pieces of the puzzle were added to the team around him. The arrival of perennial league scoring leader Guyle Fielder in 1953-54 took some of the offensive pressure off of Filion, though he continued to produce at a high level. In fact, from 1953-69 only two players ever led the franchise in scoring: Fielder and Filion.

In addition to his scoring prowess, Rudy was also known for his clean style of play. He didn't engage in the rough stuff that was so common in the minor leagues at the time, and only once did he have more than 8 penalty minutes in an entire season. In fact, he averaged only one minor penalty per every 10.8 games played. The combination of his great scoring touch and his classy style made him a fan-favorite, and he was honored by the team with "Rudy Filion Night" on March 11, 1960. He received a number of gifts from the club, local fans and the league, including a new car. The Totems faced the Spokane Comets that night and ironically, on a night honoring one of the least penalized players in the league, the two teams were involved in a near riot and combined for 33 penalties in the 4-3 Seattle win. Filion, always with a great sense of timing, picked up a hat trick including the game-winner in the third.

Filion was a key component to the 1959 WHL championship team, scoring 30 goals and 67 points during the regular season and leading the team in playoff scoring

with 7 goals and 18 points. The following season he skated alongside Bill MacFarland and Marc Boileau, and the trio was the highest scoring line in the league by combining for 103 goals.

Following a disappointing 1962-63 season Filion left Seattle and played the next three seasons in the EHL, first with Philadelphia and later with the Jersey Devils. After retiring as a player in the spring of 1966 he returned to Seattle and went to work for the Totems in the front office filling a variety of roles, ranging from scout to operations manager. He stepped behind the bench in January of 1974 to replace Jim Maloney after the Totem coach was called up to take over the Vancouver Canucks in the NHL. Unfortunately for Rudy the club was hit hard by the injury bug and managed to win only 11 times over the last 35 games of the season, finishing a disappointing fifth.

Statistically Filion had an impressive career in Seattle, second only to his teammate Guyle Fielder. His 887 games played, 316 goals, 553 assists and 869 total points are all second all-time in Seattle hockey history behind the great Fielder. He is the only player to have skated for the Ironmen, Bombers, Americans and Totems, and he remains a favorite of all long-time Seattle hockey fans.

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>.