

# Les Habitants — 75 years of Montreal mystique

by Mark Spector

Remember back seven years ago when the mighty Montreal Canadiens first ventured west for their inaugural appearance at the Northlands Coliseum?

Every hockey writer in Edmonton was writing about it for days before the game. The local coffee shops were abuzz with talk about the upcoming game. That was quite possibly the hottest ever ticket to try and track down in this city.

Because let's face it, you weren't really a member of the National Hockey League until you had taken on the men from St. Catherine Street.

But that was 1979. Nowadays, in '86, it isn't quite as much of a big deal.

Not quite — but pretty darn close.

On Monday night in the home of the Stanley Cup champion Edmonton Oilers, there were present

about 3000 persons who could either be labelled traitors for cheering against the home side or, more correctly, the sternest of loyalists. People who haven't forgotten where their loyalty lay back in the days before Gretzky and company were thrilling us northern folk.

But Edmonton is no exception.

"The Habs are an institution in Canada," said Edmonton-born Habs goalie Doug Soetart after a disappointing 3-2 loss. "Everywhere we go in Canada it seems that half of the fans are cheering for us."

"It's a big event when Montreal comes to town. The people have been watching them play on Hockey Night in Canada every Saturday ever since there was T.V."

Soetart broke into the league as a member of the New York Rangers, but eventually moved on to the Winnipeg Jets and then the Canadiens.

"I was a Canadian fan as I was

growing up and I was very happy to get an opportunity to join their organization. For that I thank (G.M.) Serge Savard who saw me play in Winnipeg (where Savard played out his career) and appreciated my talent."

But there is another side to playing for a team that has 75 years of tradition behind it, and Wayne Gretzky can recognize it even from the other side of the fence.

"It's got to be extra difficult for a young player to come into a situation like that and perform well. With them it seems like every game's a big game," which would only add to the pressure of trying not to look out of place as a rookie in the NHL.

But even after seven years of playing against Montreal, the mystique still remains.

"You look at the Dodgers and the Tigers in baseball and you'll see that both of those teams have great

histories.

"But there's only one New York Yankees.

"Other clubs just have to respect that crest," said Gretzky of the hal-lowed CH that is stitched onto the Montreal sweaters. And the respect for the crest goes far beyond that.

"I remember during my first year in the NHL when, after a game, one guy's sweater fell onto the floor. Bryan Watson (ex-Oiler coach) said that if that would have happened in the Canadian dressing room Jean Beliveau would have grabbed that guy by the throat."

Gretzky would love to see that kind of tradition evolve with his own club over the years, but equaling the Habs in that regard would be virtually impossible.

"I don't think that any team will ever overtake them," said The Great One of the Montreal tradition.

But there is one other depart-

ment that Edmonton could one day overtake them in, and that is Stanley Cups won against each other.

"An Edmonton/Montreal Stanley Cup... that would be unbelievable," dreamed Oiler rearguard Kevin Lowe. Lowe, born in Lachute, Quebec grew up watching the Richards and Beliveau just as youngsters from this part of Canada are growing up with Gretzky and Coffey.

For me, it was the first time that I had actually seen the red, white, and blue jerseys of Montreal live and in person. That alone was a thrill.

Kevin Lowe is right. A Stanley Cup encounter between les Habitants and the Oilers is the stuff dreams are made of.

It would be unbelievable.

## CWUAA standings

FINAL									
	GP	W	L	T	GF	GA	PTS	PCT	
Alberta	28	20	8	0	173	114	40	.714	
Calgary	28	19	9	0	162	136	38	.679	
Man.	28	18	10	0	159	129	36	.643	
Sask.	28	16	12	0	136	115	32	.571	
Brandon	28	13	15	0	155	160	26	.464	
UBC	28	12	16	0	113	144	24	.429	
Regina	28	8	20	0	127	162	16	.286	
Leth.	28	6	22	0	99	164	12	.214	

## SCORING LEADERS

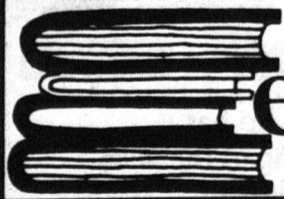
PLAYER	TEAM	GP	G	A	PTS
T. Lenardon	Bran.	28	27	40	67
K. Petrash	Man.	28	19	33	52
R. Nasheim	Reg.	22	22	28	50
J. Mollard	Bran.	22	21	27	48
P. Geddes	Cal.	28	15	29	44
R. Lindquist	Bran.	28	22	21	43
K. Vinge	Cal.	27	15	28	43
A. Knoll	Sask.	26	23	19	42
D. Cranston	Alta.	28	15	27	42
W. Dosko	Reg.	28	15	27	42
B. Bracko	Cal.	28	18	23	41
G. Koebel	Alta.	28	13	28	41
H. Mahood	Man.	28	11	30	41
R. Laycock	Cal.	26	20	20	40
C. Dill	Alta.	27	20	20	40

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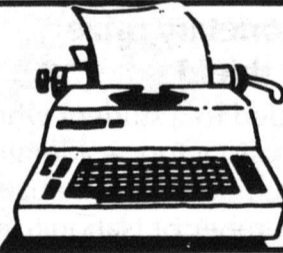
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