



FACE OFF

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE BOOSTER CLUBS

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2014 AAHLBC Convention: Family First

From Hershey BC Bear Facts Newsletter, Tom Mara

There is an oft-used expression that goes “You can choose your friends but not your family”. While genetically speaking, that is true, there is another kind of family, one brought together by shared experiences, love and support. At the Doubletree in Downtown Pittsburgh on the weekend after Labor Day, it came as no surprise to any of us when that family feeling was on full display as the AHL Booster Clubs got together to celebrate their 50th annual Convention.

With the arrivals of the first groups of fans on Wednesday, the atmosphere was about fun and family. For a number of us, just getting together with friends we see all too rarely is the catalyst behind coming in early. The usual hugs and kisses abounded, and as people settled in, things began to take shape. We worked a pair of room crawl fundraisers around everyone’s tourism and dinner plans and got the weekend off to a great start. Downtown Pittsburgh has no shortage of terrific restaurants, and we took advantage of the selection to enjoy a great variety of cuisines.

A number of people who came in from the Eastern sector mentioned that they had stopped at the Flight 93 Memorial on the way out, while some had made plans to visit the site during their stay. While there was no organized hospitality room on Wednesday, there were a number of smaller groups around the hotel (and out on the town), in addition to a group that called the lobby home for a time.

Thursday has become the primary arrival day for Convention, and this year was no different. Some tours were set up for this day, though a good number of people ventured out on their own or in small groups. Places like Market Square in downtown and Station Square just across



the river were the big attractions for their food and shopping selections. In the afternoon, both an official and unofficial “pub crawl” ventured through Carson Street, another popular area of town before ending at a very popular (with good reason) dining area. The “Hofbrau House” was the prime attraction, and the food & service were terrific.

Making our way back to the hotel, the hospitality room was in full swing. The ever popular card games were in full swing, and a number of folks spent their time getting reacquainted with friends. A good number of people came away with plans for Friday due to suggestions from others. The prime tours for Friday were also being planned as a lot of us were looking forward to seeing Pittsburgh’s sporting venues.

Friday also offered us a look at our history, which was the theme of this 50th annual Convention. In the check in area were several hundred photos that covered the years

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Mission Statement

The purpose of this organization will be:

- a. To promote better understanding between Booster Clubs and the American Hockey League Organization.
- b. To Compare and attempt to alleviate problems confronting each individual Booster Club.
- c. To act as a social organization for Booster Club members.

Submitting an Article

To submit an article to this newsletter, please email it to lighthouseman2@yahoo.com with "AAHLBC Newsletter" in the subject line.

Please note: Your club must be a member of the AAHLBC in order to submit an article to this newsletter.

Editor: Bill Walch

2014 Convention Photos



On the Left:

A view of Pittsburgh from the incline.

On the Right:

Providence's Joe Ferraro & our own Dennis Gottesman flanked by Cleveland's Katherine Browne, Megan Tomblin, Angie Takas & Lisa Wallen.



On the Left (clockwise from top left):

Steve Belforti, Joyce Basehoar, Ray Clarke, Roger Carpenter, Michelle Gagnon, Jim Clukey & Bill Walch.

On the Right:

Members who flew to Convention gear up for their return home at the airport.



Convention Photo Winner

Congrats to Lori Uilecan (Bridgeport). Your photo was selected as the winner of the 2014 Convention's Funniest Photo Contest.

Thanks you to all who participated this year. We received more photos than ever before.

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well, bringing back memories for a lot of us, and provoking much discussion among the newer attendees.

The evening brought it even more to light, as the jerseys were a reminder of our time together. Old and new alike, from the Hamilton Canucks to the Kentucky Thoroughblades, to a ride through history in Binghamton. We saw some old New Haven jerseys on display as well. It was a great tribute by those who chose to remember where we've come from. Newer teams kicked in with some impressive special jerseys of their own to remind us to keep an eye on the future.

Of course, we had our own perspective, with a variety of old & new as well as a member who honored a former AHL team.

Saturday came and as always, the raffles abounded. Numerous items were available, most notably for us being the chocolate basket, a favorite among fans from other teams. We got our business done at the annual meeting, and then it was off to the final group tours, some individual activities, or just lounging around the hotel while looking forward to the evening's festivities.

Saturday, we proved once again that hockey fans can dress up a place very nicely. We enjoyed a very nice dinner, and then got to hear former NHL'er Phil Bourque chat about his AHL days (over 300 games with the Baltimore Skipjacks), his time (and two Stanley Cups) in Pittsburgh, and how he almost became a Boston Bruin.

Once the raffles were all done (our 50-50 went to Hamilton's Charlotte Dinning, while the hotly contested basket went west with Tom Boese back to Rockford), it was one more night in the hospitality room, the annual midnight rendition of the Canadian & American anthems, and the tough realization that our weekend was nearing an end. Given that the Steelers were at home Sunday, the idea of early departure was on a lot of minds, so a good number of the farewell hugs & kisses took place Saturday night.

The host clubs put a huge amount of effort into these things (as we know from 2011), and I want to commend the Pittsburgh Booster Club, the Philadelphia Firebirds Booster Club and the Executive Board on the results. As one of the original Convention clubs, it was a natural fit to have a historic one in an original city, and the venue made for a terrific time.

Chip Hanuscik does a marvelous job getting us these great hotels and extremely reasonable prices (check the NHL Convention rates for comparison), and

between coordinating payments, getting the word out and bringing it all together, it's a job well done that they need to be recognized for. Many thanks go out to the host clubs & our E-Board for their efforts.

We look forward to visiting Albany in 2015 as we build on the memories we've made, the friendships created and built along the way, and the people that make this more than just a party & vacation – it truly is a family reunion.

Cover Photo

When we talk about "family", it tends to sound like just words to a lot of people, and there are times it can be difficult to explain. However, this year proved a very different story. Our cover photo is about a member of our "family", Philadelphia's Jeremy Hall, who has had severe health and financial issues this past summer. A number of members got together to purchase these "Hall Monitor" shirts in support of him. The room crawl fundraisers mentioned on Page 1, numerous individual contributions and a number of the Saturday raffles were also targeted towards easing their burden as Jeremy continues his fight against head and neck cancer.

Jeremy (who did attend this Convention) vows to be in Albany in 2015, and we are all looking forward to seeing him there as well as at the games this season.

Convention Photo Credits

This has always been one of my favorite issues to do, most notably because I get to use photos from around the league to tell the story of the Convention. I could not do so without the talent and permission of people like Lisa Wallen (Cleveland), David Sturm (Rochester), Michele Gagnon (Manchester), Lori Uilecan (Bridgeport), and Hershey's own Dennis Gottesman & Teddy Kaltreider. Thank you! Tom Mara

A Special Message

Please accept our sincere gratitude for your support during this tough battle that Jeremy has ahead. We were stunned by everything at convention. The love from our hockey family is incredible and inspiring. We both love Convention. It holds a special place in our hearts. Please let us know if you are coming to Allentown so we can meet up at the arena. We love all of you and we are thankful to have family like you.



Donna & Jeremy



No. 1 Sharks fan keeps the faith

Re-printed with permission of the Telegram & Gazette (Worcester, Mass.). Article by Kim Ring

MARLBORO — While she might not be the loudest fan in the arena, Christine O'Shea is certainly the biggest fan of the Worcester Sharks hockey team.

Just ask the players. Or the coach.

"Without her we wouldn't get goodies on the bus," coach Roy Sommer said as he visited with Ms.

O'Shea outside Sharks practice Wednesday at the New England Sports Center. "Without people like her, teams don't survive. You have to have loyal fans."

And when it comes to loyal, Ms. O'Shea is tops. She won't say a critical word about a player, can't pick a favorite from the roster, wears something teal (often teal cowboy boots) every day and stays until the end of every game — even when she's traveled to a road game hours from her home in Worcester.

Several years ago she was the last Sharks fan sitting behind the net when the team was knocked out of the Calder Cup playoffs by the Hartford Wolfpack. She can't remember the score, but it had been obvious for some time that there would be no comeback from the big deficit the Sharks were facing.

Still, she sat until every one of "her guys" had left the ice, and the Hartford fans — not generally known for being friendly to visiting fans — complimented her on her dedication. She grew up watching sports and grew to love hockey, though no one else in the family was as devoted to the sport, and she's worked through the booster club to promote the team and help out the players.

Players said they need the fans and hearing shouts from the stands is motivating, but most days they can't hear Ms. O'Shea at all. For a decade she's been battling a sort of chronic laryngitis that



Above: Worcester Sharks fan Christine O'Shea of Worcester is all smiles as she talks about her passion for hockey while watching the Sharks last week at the New England Sports Center in Marlboro.

(T&G STAFF PHOTOS/PAUL KAPTEYN)

reduces her voice to a whisper for months at a time. Even surgery has failed to cure the problem, but she makes her support of the team known in other ways.

"We don't hear her, but we see her and it's comforting," said Jimmy Bonneau, the team's 6-foot, 3-inch left winger.

While he's known for his fists and his scoring ability, he says he's a gentleman off the ice and believes fans deserve a

measure of respect, especially the ones like Ms. O'Shea, who packs snack bags with her trademark Shark Bites fruit candy and notes of encouragement and leaves them on the team bus for the players.

"Fans make a huge difference when you have the truly faithful fans like Chris who are going to be there no matter what," Mr. Bonneau said.

He understands that it's tough to be an American Hockey League fan because once a player is doing well, he leaves to play for the parent club. While Mr. Bonneau has dreamed of winning a Calder Cup — the league's equivalent of Lord Stanley's Cup, playing a game "up top" would be "a dream come true, also." Ms. O'Shea said she follows players' careers after they leave Worcester, sometimes catching up with them in person on her road trips.

But despite fans like Ms. O'Shea, the San Jose Sharks announced last month that it hopes to move the Worcester Sharks to the West Coast after this season when the team's DCU Center lease expires.

And while the team has enjoyed a loyal following, Worcester hasn't exactly embraced pro hockey.

This will be Worcester's 20th season in the AHL, with a one-year hiatus between the IceCats (1994-2005) and the Sharks, who arrived in 2006;

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something fans like Ms. O'Shea spent a year lobbying for and something she's ready to do again should her beloved team go West.

The Sharks averaged just 3,958 fans a game last season, which ranked 23 out of 30 AHL teams. The league average was 5,402, while Hershey was tops with 9,664. In fact, Worcester has often lagged in attendance, last averaging over 6,000 fans in 2000-01.

Some would argue the Sharks' so-called lack of support has much to do with the lack of success on the ice. Worcester finished 11th in the AHL's 15-team Eastern Conference last year with a 36-34 -4 record and hasn't qualified for the playoffs since the 2009-10 season.

That season, however, was Worcester's worst at the gate, averaging just 3,672 fans.

Still, as she sat watching practice, Ms. O'Shea said she feels good about this year's team. The sound of blades on ice gets her excited, she said, adding that while she enjoys watching the Red Sox, she spends the summer longing for hockey season to start again. Like other AHL fans, she's been counting down the days until the drop of the puck at home Oct. 18 against the Providence Bruins - a team that always brings in a crowd.

Ms. O'Shea has had her season ticket for as long as the team's been around, and she's ready for the 40-plus home games this season. But as always, she'll watch the play unfold on a monitor in the hallway of the DCU Center because she's a fixture at the Sharks' booster club table where she sells 50-50 raffle tickets to raise funds for selected charities and events for players.

"I have a season ticket, but I've never sat in the seat," she said.

In order to see games inside the arena she travels, many times booster club members meet up at other rinks. Springfield, Hartford, Providence, Manchester — almost every American Hockey League rink the former Ice Cats and now her beloved Sharks have visited she's been to, as well — except St. John's, Newfoundland, and that's on her list.

"I've seen a lot because of hockey," she said. "I've traveled a lot. I've been to St. Louis, Kentucky,



Above: Worcester Sharks fan Christine O'Shea even wears teal cowboy boots while watching the Sharks during a pre-season practice.

(T&G STAFF PHOTOS/PAUL KAPTEYN)

Texas. When we go we don't just see hockey, we see other things, too."

The St. Louis Arch, Churchill Downs and the Alamo, to name a few. She's also been to San Jose to see the guys who made it "up top" after playing in Worcester and, she said, she got greetings from players who spotted her from the ice during warm-ups. It makes her feel like a proud parent, though she is single and has no children of her own.

"Sometimes people ask me if I have a son on the team, and which one he is," she said. "I say, 'All of them.'"

A special thank you: I would like to personally thank the Worcester Telegram & Gazette for allowing us to reprint this article in Faceoff, the AAHLBC newsletter, for all association members to see. Chris is a very special person. She is known to many throughout AHL booster club circles in both the United States and Canada.

Bill Walsh



Coming to an arena near you!



The following is a list of cities booster clubs are planning bus trips to and the dates they are planning to be in town.

Albany

November 21 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (game only)

Allentown

December 19 - Hershey

January 30 - Hershey

February 28 - Binghamton

April 19 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (kid's trip)

Bridgeport

February 8 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (game only)

March 22 - Binghamton

April 10 & 11 - Manchester - 1 Night in Bridgeport

Hartford

March 7 - Hershey

Manchester

January 9 & 10 - Binghamton - 2 Nights - Radisson

March 6 & 7 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (2 games)

Norfolk

October 31/November 1 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton

April 3 & 4 - Hershey - 2 Nights

Pittsburgh

January 3 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton - 1 Night

Portland

March 19, 20, 21 & 22 - Hershey - 4 Nights - Hampton Inn @ Maine Mall

April 11 & 12 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (2 games) - 2 Nights

Providence

January 18 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton

March 6 - Hershey

Springfield

March 8 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton

Worcester

January 9 - Binghamton (game only)

January 17 - Wilkes-Barre/Scranton

March 18 - Hershey (game only)

Wilkes-Barre/Scranton

December 31 - Hershey - Overnight

Game Only mean the booster club is not staying in the area after the game.

The information provided here is just informational. All trips are tentative and may not happen. Please contact the traveling booster club for final trip plans, if needed.

More booster club trips will be add once the other clubs release their trip schedules.

Order Your Convention Recap DVD Now!!!



AAHLBC Convention DVD Order Form

To purchase a copy (one DVD) of the AAHLBC Convention Recap videos, contact Dennis Gottesman. Ten percent of DVD sales will be donated to the **Jack Schott Foundation**, which was this year's convention charity.

DVD orders must be postmarked no later than **Nov. 30th, 2014** & DVD's will be shipped out soon after.

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