

Assembly of First Nations Welcomes Hockey Hall of Fame Honouring the Sagkeeng Oldtimers First Nations Hockey Team

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(Ottawa, ON) – Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde and AFN Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart welcomed the recognition of the Sagkeeng Oldtimers hockey team by the Hockey Hall of Fame at a ceremony that took place Tuesday January 9 in Toronto. The team was made up largely of residential school survivors from Manitoba.

“I congratulate all those players who were part of the groundbreaking Sagkeeng Oldtimers hockey team on this important recognition,” said AFN National Chief Bellegarde. “This is a fascinating story of courage, strength and healing that deserves to be shared with all Canadians. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for governments, sports halls of fame and other organizations to work with Indigenous peoples to provide public education about Indigenous athletes. I lift up the Hockey Hall of Fame for understanding that the Sagkeeng Oldtimers are part of the story of hockey in Canada, and part of the story of Canada itself. This is an example of reconciliation in action, and a tremendous way for Canadians to learn more about our history.”

For a period of over 20 years, starting in 1978, the Sagkeeng Oldtimers hockey team travelled and competed nationally and internationally in many hockey tournaments. Walter and Verna Fontaine, who had attended the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School in Manitoba in the late 1930's and early 1940's, were the founders and fundraisers of the Sagkeeng Oldtimers. Members of the team included former AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine, former AFN Manitoba Regional Chief Ken Young and current Treaty 6 Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild.

AFN Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart stated, “This hockey team is a jewel of Manitoba sports history. These men dedicated themselves to a sport they love and were able to travel the world. Playing, practicing and traveling together helped them bond together in a positive spirit, and helped in dealing with the traumatic impacts of residential school. They are role models for our youth and our athletes. I congratulate them and look forward to seeing this showcase in the near future.”

The Sagkeeng Oldtimers were honoured on Tuesday January 9 with a ceremony and a showcase of artifacts in the New Acquisition display area within Canada's national Hockey Hall of Fame.