

Hockey Hall of Fame honours Sagkeeng Oldtimers in new display

Team made up mostly of residential school survivors competed internationally

Rhiannon Johnson · [CBC News](#) January 9, 2018



The Sagkeeng Oldtimers team in 1993. The team holds titles in the 1987 World Cup, 1989 World Cup in Munich and in the 1987 Canadian National Cup. (submitted)

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An Indigenous hockey team made up primarily of residential school survivors was honoured by Canada's Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto on Tuesday.

The Sagkeeng Oldtimers hockey team joined the Canadian Oldtimers Hockey Association in 1978 and went on to compete in international tournaments throughout Europe, the United States and Canada.

The team was made up of players from the Sagkeeng First Nation, a community 100 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg, ranging in age from 35 to over 50. The team holds titles in the 1987 World Cup, 1989 World Cup in Munich and in the 1987 Canadian National Cup.

The team was founded by Walter Fontaine and his wife Verna. Their daughter Darlene Ahmo and her children acquired memorabilia to send to the Hockey Hall of Fame, which now has them on public view in two displays.

'They never gave up'

When she first saw the exhibit, she said she was overwhelmed, but in a good way. With tears welling up, she said she wished her parents could see all of their hard work honoured.

Fundraising for the team's travel was done through community events like bingo tournaments.



Derrick Henderson, Chief of Sagkeeng First Nation, and Ted Fontaine, defenceman, at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. (Rhiannon Johnson/CBC)

"They wanted their community to see the world," Ahmo said.

"I saw how my parents struggled to make all this possible with all the travelling and the hard work they put into it. They made a lot of sacrifices and they never gave up."

- **Team made up of residential school survivors recognized by Hockey Hall of Fame**

The team's display at the Hockey Hall of Fame is a nod to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 87th call to action, which calls for sports halls of fame to provide public education on the stories of Indigenous athletes.

"The exposure that will come from being in the Hockey Hall of Fame is so important to Canada and to the rest of the world, especially for reconciliation," says Grand Chief Willie Littlechild of the Treaty 6 Nations.



Grand Chief Willie Littlechild stands in front of the new Sagkeeng Oldtimers display at the Hockey Hall of Fame. (Rhiannon Johnson/CBC)

Littlechild travelled across Canada for six and a half years as a Truth and Reconciliation commissioner listening to thousands of stories from the saddest and darkest, most unknown chapter of Canadian history, he said. Through all of the dark stories, he said there was one bright light that cut through that history.

"That bright light was the important role of sports in residential school, especially hockey," he said.

Healing through hockey

The healing power of hockey is something that Littlechild said he experienced, having spent 14 years in the residential school system. That was where he learned to play hockey, and he had the opportunity to join the Sagkeeng Oldtimers on the rink.

"It's a very important story because it talks about the resilience and the strength of Indigenous people, especially through sport," said Littlechild.



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Sagkeeng Oldtimers hockey team presents the Hockey Hall of Fame with a Star Blanket.
On left: Derrick Henderson, Robert Guimond, Ted Fontaine and Hockey Hall of Fame Curator
Pritchard. (Rhiannon Johnson/CBC)

Derrick Henderson, Chief of the Sagkeeng First Nation, agreed.

"Acceptance and preservation of Sagkeeng Oldtimers pays tribute to the important role of
hockey in the lives of former students of Indian Residential Schools in Canada, the survival
through years of incarceration of their lives and our enduring belief that the existence and freedom
of Indigenous people can never be vanquished," he said.

Henderson said the recognition of the Sagkeeng Oldtimers, in response to the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, is an important step for Canada and that it shows a
new chapter of Canadian history that has not been acknowledged on such a national platform.

"I hope more Indigenous athletes will be recognized in the future.

"It is like an open door and anything is possible."