

Shaker Hockey First Game
11-23-2020

COVID-19 casts a long, ominous shadow over the Shaker Heights High School hockey team with practices and the start of the 2020-21 season temporarily suspended, thanks to the virus.

Face masks, social distancing, Zoom meetings, no access to Thornton Park locker rooms, and eerily vacant grandstands have turned everything the team does into a strange, awkward ordeal. Throw in a contentious presidential election for added drama and distraction.

One thing the virus and politics cannot touch is the 50th anniversary of Shaker's first game in modern history, played on December 3, 1970.

Tumultuous, tragic 2020 in many ways mirrors the troubling times of 1970.

Anti-Vietnam war protests raged as a wartime military draft hung over the heads of high school seniors. Shaker Heights grabbed international headlines on February 2 when its police station was bombed and flattened by a vengeful Shaker graduate, resulting in 14 serious injuries and one death—the bomber. As a result, Thornton Park was closed for months, becoming the temporary home of the police department. Four Kent State University students were shot and killed by the National Guard on May 4, and 75 members of the Marshall University football team perished in a plane crash on November 14.

Then—on a more positive note—there was Thursday, December 3, 1970.

"I Think I Love You" by the Partridge Family, and *"The Tears of a Clown"* by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles topped the music charts. Moviegoers jammed theaters to watch *"Scrooge"* and *"Lovers and Strangers,"* and the defending Eastern Conference champion Cleveland Browns prepared to face the Houston Oilers at the Astrodome on Monday Night Football.

And the day the Shaker High School hockey team—lead by co-head coaches Bob McBride and Jim Weiss—took flight, and was on its way to a magical 18-0-1, state championship season.

Clad in tattered white, gold, and black, Boston Bruin jerseys—on-loan from the Shaker Youth Hockey program—and mismatched pants of every color imaginable, the upstart Red Raiders took the ice at Garfield Heights.

Unseasonably warm temperatures made for less than desirable—if not hazardous—playing conditions at Garfield's opened-ended Dan Kostel Recreation Center. Sixty-degree temperatures and a violent late-game thunderstorm produced wet, soft, and frustratingly slow ice as Shaker slogged and slogged to a 4-2 victory over the Garfield Bulldogs.

"I never saw it so wet in my life," commented Don McGinnis, Red Raiders' junior forward, after the game. Wind-swept rain drenched spectators watching around the open perimeter of the rink.

Bruce Kohrman scored the first goal in Shaker history, unassisted, mid-way through the first period as Shaker jumped to a 1-0 lead. Ironically, that would be the only goal of the season for the junior forward. Today, Kohrman is a highly regarded neurosurgeon in Miami, Florida.

Garfield tied it a few minutes later, slipping the puck past starting Shaker goalie Art “Goose Egg” Vance who finished with seven saves in his one period of work. Vance earned his nickname racking up shutout, goose-egg zeros, finishing the 1970-71 season with a 1.35 goals per-game average.

Shaker grabbed a 2-1 lead on a second-period goal by junior center Dave Straffon, assisted by wing Gary Curtis. Garfield pulled even moments later, solving Shaker goalie Jeff Greenham. The sophomore netminder—son of then Shaker High School Principal, Dr. William Greenham—recorded seven second period saves.

Junior goalie Mike Feigenbaum finished Shaker net duties with a shutout, 16-save, third-period performance. Today he owns Lucy’s Sweet Surrender bakery on Chagrin Blvd. in Shaker.

Red Raider junior defenseman Tom_Matia notched the game-winning goal, unassisted, late in the second period. Today Matia—a former boxing champion—heads the Shaker High School Hockey Alumni Association.

Team captain and center Mike Corkran capped the scoring with a third-period goal assisted by Straffon and junior defenseman Mark Drollinger. But that is not Corkran’s most memorable first-game moment. A flubbed second period penalty shot is.

“They gave me a penalty shot after I got tripped going in for a shot,” Corkran shared nearly 50 years later. “I skated in for the penalty shot, looked up at the goal, and the puck wasn’t on my stick anymore. The puck got stuck in a puddle.”

“There’s nothing more embarrassing in hockey than losing control of a puck on a penalty shot because you can’t go back and get it,” Corkran explained. “It’s more embarrassing than having your pants fall down at center ice. It was the only penalty shot I was ever awarded in all the years I played, and I blew it.” Corkran continued his hockey career at Dartmouth College.

A humbling prelude to an amazing season for Corkran who went on to record 44 goals, 27 assists, 71 total points, and seven hat tricks, to lead the 1970-71 Red Raiders in all four of those statistical categories. Today, Corkran heads China Centric Associates, an international business consulting firm.

Strange circumstances and a humble beginning to a 50-year legacy of Shaker hockey excellence that has produced 10 state championships, 10 Baron Cup titles, and countless other league and tournament crowns.

“We were a rag-tag bunch,” co-coach McBride described his 1970-71 Red Raiders. “Nobody knew what to expect. We weren’t sure what we had or what we were going to do. I had no vision we were going to do well. It’s—like—we’ll go play and see what happens.”

Goalie Vance agreed. “I don’t know if we looked too far down the road,” he recently reflected. “It was game-to-game, and we figured out as the season went on— ‘hey, we are winning some games, here’—and it became a little more serious. Practices were a little more serious, and our roles and lines started to form up.”

“The kids were picking things up, learning things, and how to operate,” McBride added. “We had a positive attitude, but I never expected us to do as well as we did in a first year.” McBride played at Colby College, lead by NCAA coaching legend Jack Kelley.

Coach Weiss—a University of Wisconsin hockey alum—shared similar thoughts.

“It was all new to us,” reflected Weiss. “We were just going with the flow, seeing what would happen. But you know, as we started playing, everything started jelling and we realized that we had something good here.” He and McBride compiled a 119-29-4 record—including three state championships—during their six-year, coaching reign.

Weiss heaped praise on all those that made that first season a reality.

“We had the perfect setup—the school and city totally backed us,” said Weiss. “They gave us the perfect practice schedule—that was a huge thing—late afternoons and early evenings, every day. No other team in the Cleveland area had that. They also gave us the perfect game time—Saturday evenings.

“Bill Greenham (Shaker High School Principal) went all the way for us,” Weiss continued. “That could have been the biggest difference of all. The parents were also all on our side—so supportive of the coaches and school—which you don’t always find in today’s world.”

“Everybody—school, parents, the city, the players, the coaches—put the team first,” emphasized Weiss. “Totally unselfish.”