

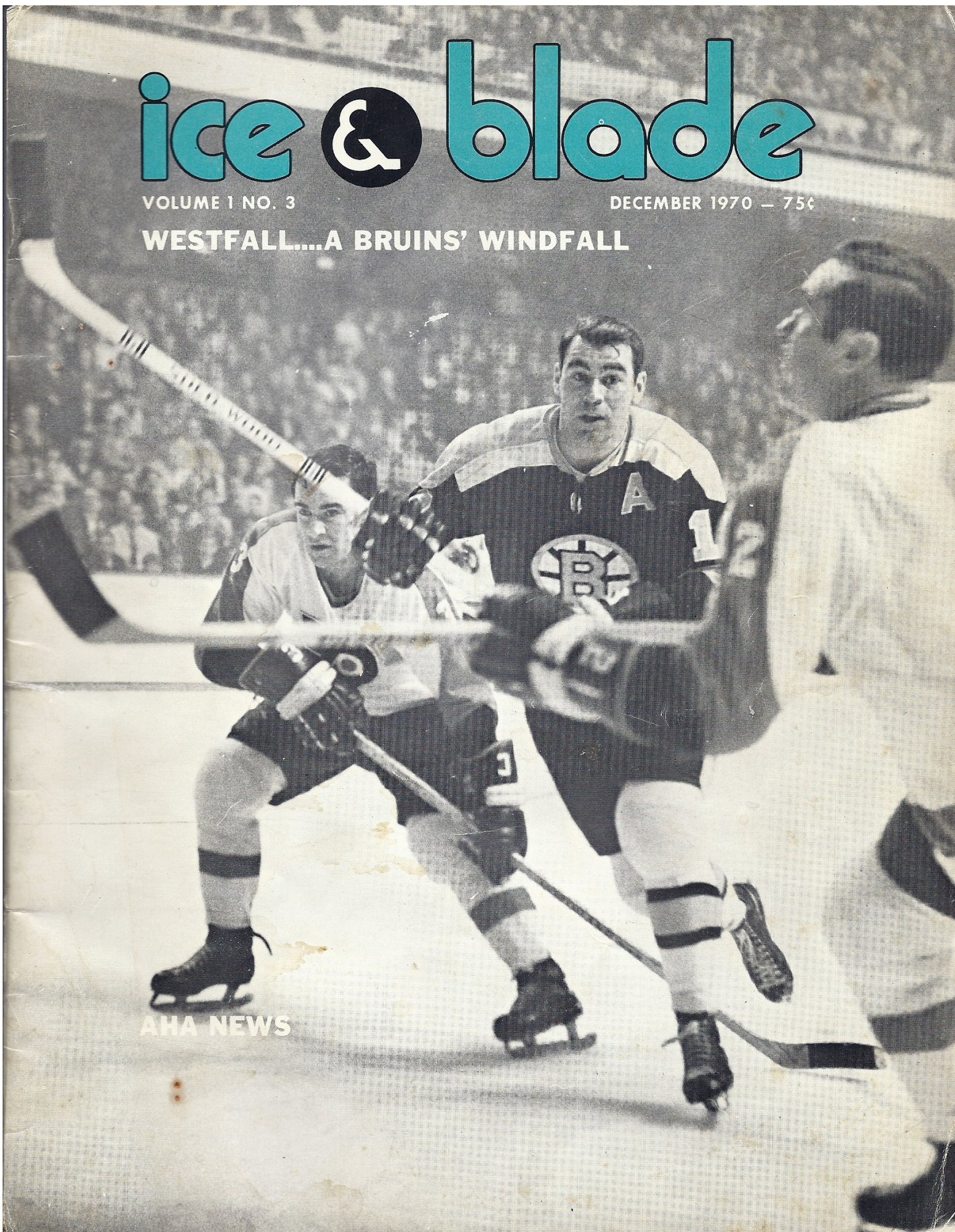
# ice & blade

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**WESTFALL....A BRUINS' WINDFALL**

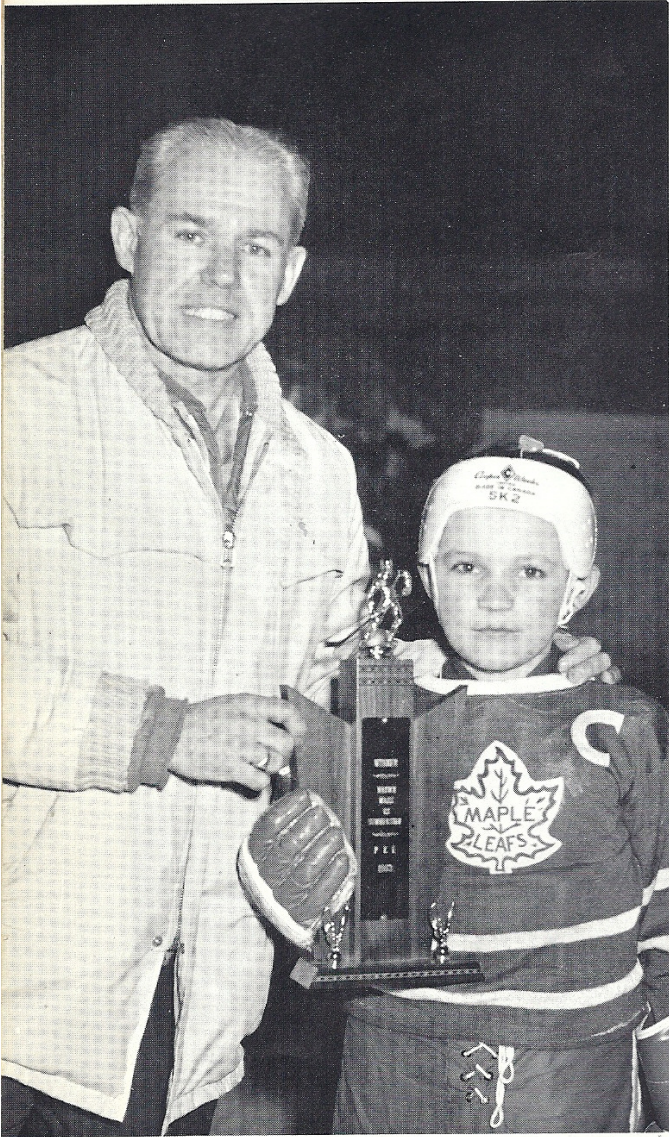
AHA NEWS





# NATICK COMETS STORY

by John Veracka



**Bill Chase, President of Natick Comets, presenting Trophy to Captain of the Summerside, Prince Edward Island, team at conclusion of International Friendship Series.**

"There are 8 million stories in the Naked City" — This epilogue from a TV show of yesteryear provides the theme of the Natick (Mass.) Comets Inc. Youth Hockey Program because there are at least that many tales emanating from their 18-year history.

From an original founding in 1952 of 12 boys to its present status of 530 boys in the youth hockey program and 100 girls in the figure skating club, the Natick Comets depict the epitome of success in youth hockey and skating programs everywhere.

There are countless individuals who have contributed to this successful endeavor but none greater than William "Bill" Chase, who along with his brother Earle, and John Irving, founded the Natick Comets in 1952.

"It all started when Billy Henderson, who was our newsboy at the time, saw my hockey and goalie equipment in the hallway while he was making his collections," said Chase, "and he expressed an interest in learning the game."

Henderson, who had a slight birth defect in his feet, practiced in earnest in the back yard under Chase's tutelage and "when he was ready, we got the rest of the boys and entered the old Mayflower League at the Boston Skating Club," continued hockey buff Chase, who was a defenseman at Natick High and later a goaltender in the Coast Guard and in semi-pro competition.

So amazing was Bill Henderson's determination and dedication that he overcame his handicap, with the help of a major operation, and rose to an executive position with the Philadelphia Flyers of the NHL after an outstanding goalie career with the Comets, Natick High, Harvard University, and several semi-professional teams.

He is but one of the great stories from the archives of the Natick Comets.

As the Comets enter their 19th year of operation, a bit of history; The original team played in fall and spring competition for a few seasons at the Boston Skating Club and later on switched rinks and played at the Worcester Arena in what was then the Central Mass. League.

Beset with many problems and obstacles such as transportation, lack of funds, schedules, etc., the Comets plunged on and settled each in the best way possible. Transportation to and from the rinks still remains the biggest problem today and is on the verge of being solved with their new home, the West Suburban Arena, almost a reality.



As interest in organized youth hockey continued to grow, the Comets incorporated under the guidance of a board of directors. They quickly saw the need of bringing boys into the program at an earlier age as a "feeder" system. Thus the training of younger boys to be used as reserves for the main squad was started.

And the Comets grew, steadily and surely, until the present size was reached including the addition of the girls' figure skating program.

Bob Ghilani, one of the original 12 Comets, is now varsity hockey coach at Natick High. Rusty Devereaux, of the original group, is football coach at Coolidge Jr. High. Dick Kane and Bill Balcom have come back to coach teams in the program as have many other graduates.

Of the original three founders, only Bill Chase remains in an active capacity, President of the Comets, and the only leader the Comets have known for all of their 18 years. John Irving keeps tabs on the organization through his role as scorekeeper in the Eastern Mass Bantam League of which the Comets are members.

Two other long time contributors, who were instrumental in the Comets success, are assistant comptroller for the town of Natick, Jack Jennings, and the legendary Bill Morris. Jennings is an intramural coach and Bill has coached the Bantam All-Stars for eight years.

"There were hundreds of other people who entered and left the program in unison with their sons. They worked during their own eras of involvement," said President Chase, "but their contributions and assistance was as appreciated and vital as anyone's."

"The ladies and mothers deserve a lot of praise too for we couldn't have succeeded without them, their help, and their understanding."

But it is Chase himself who remains as the driving force behind the organization. His interest in youth skating programs are without parallel.

It was he who stimulated the drive for the soon to be realized West Suburban Arena, home of the Natick Comets, which is scheduled for opening in early 1971. Nearly \$200,000 has been pledged so far for this enclosed ice facility which is believed to be the only one of its kind wholly built and owned by a youth hockey association. Just another of the amazing stories of the Natick Comets.

This non-profit, charitable organization, which is a household word in the communities of Dover, Natick, Sherborn, Sudbury, Wayland, and Wes-

ton, all of whom are part of the West Suburban area, offers complete skating programs for beginners, Tykes, Squirts, Peewees, and Bantams, and offers figure skating instruction.

Scholarships are granted to needy children who wish to participate in the program but are financially unable to pay their share.

There are several retarded children in the program and their progress and acceptance is a marvel to teachers and educationalists who have observed them in participation of this type.

Another unique innovation of the Comets is their own Skate Shop, a retail store, which sells equipment and provides a skate sharpening service. Any profits realized are put back into the program to assist in the expenses. The store, located in back of a gas station in Wayland, Mass., is entirely staffed by volunteer help, as is nearly every other project.

There has never been any restrictions on participation in the Comet program. If a boy or girl lives in any one of the Suburban communities, he or she is eligible to participate in the program.

Another of the great stories from this program is the International Friendship Series propagated with Summerside, Prince Edward Island, Canada. For many years now the Comets and their neighbors from Summerside have participated in a reciprocal home-and-home series in which the boys live in with their opposites while away from home.

It is hoped that this season's International Friendship Series will take place at the new West Suburban Arena. It would indeed be a fitting dedication.

The Framingham Youth Hockey Program is also an offshoot of the Comets as three Framingham residents were instrumental in its organization through association with the Natick group.

Emilio Brandolini, Ed Shephard, and Charlie Sage formed the Framingham program after spending numerous years coaching in the Comets Program.

The girls figure skating program, which was inaugurated in 1965, is another first for the Comets. It is believed to be the only combined hockey and figure skating group in the area. Someday one of the Comettes will be participating in national competition.

Last year President Bill Chase was made the honorary Mayor of Summerside for a day during Natick's visit to Prince Edward Island. It was no



light thing, since the Canadians take their government seriously and Chase was required to serve his term.

Throughout the years there have been numerous championships and honors bestowed on the Comets and many of their graduates have added more laurels in the field of sports.

Some of the more famous Comet graduates, in addition to Bill Henderson, are: Ron Chisholm, an All-American goalie at West Point and starting goaltender for the U.S. Olympic team in 1964 until injuries sidelined him; Tim Taylor, former Harvard hockey team captain; Gus Capizzo, former Northeastern great; former B.C. stars, Dick Kane and Bill Balcom; and Butch Hriniak, a member of the San Diego Padres baseball organization, are but a few of the standouts from the Comets program.

In the past years, boys from the program have been guests of Canadian villages such as Montmorency, Quebec, East York, Ontario, etc., and participated with other local boys in International Tournament competition, much to the delight of Canadian fans.

Time and space do not allow Ice and Blade to recount the numerous other incidents and stories from the Natick Comets 18-year history.

Thus a fitting epilogue to the Comets would be — "There are 8 million stories in the Natick Comets program, these have been some of them."



**FRONT ROW, Left to Right: George Goodwin, Bob Ghilani, Earle Chase (Mascot), Bill Henderson, Dick Graham, Russ Devereaux, and Dick Kane.**

**REAR: Joey Wignot, Bill Balcom, George Shepherd, Frank Quirk, Sonny Bisch, and Dick Henderson.**







**Members of the Natick Comets Figure Skating Program**



**Instructional Clinic for Coaches of Natick Comets**

**Left to Right: John Lawrence, Edward Primevara, Frank Primevara, Hawley "Pud" Thomas, and William "Bill" Chase.**