

A new book about Gerry McNeil, Montreal Canadiens Goalie!

In the Pressure of the Moment: Remembering Gerry McNeil was released last February; in addition to being a biography of the author's father (the goalie for the Montreal Canadiens before Jacques Plante), the book is a study in sports media history (photography, newsreels, radio, the beginning of the NHL on CBC television). An Eastern Canadian Book Tour followed that saw the author (David McNeil) go to six cities: Halifax, Fredericton, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. This September the "Western" tour happens, which includes Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver, and fittingly so, since in addition to Richard, the Habs had Elmer Lach and Bert Olmstead (both from Saskatchewan), and their coach Dick Irvin Sr. (Regina) like to fill the "role player" positions with westerners.

Although Gerry McNeil only play four seasons in the NHL, he played every game for the Habs from the spring of 1950 to the fall of 1952. He appeared in four straight Stanley Cup Finals, three of which were decided in sudden death. He lost when Bill Barilko scored his spectacular goal in '51 and again on a fluky goal by Leswick in '54. He won the Stanley Cup with a perfect 1-0 overtime performance against the Bruins in '53. McNeil was there to see the Rocket reach the peak of his career, to see Gordie Howe dominate the scoring race, and to see the rise of a *Canadiens* dynasty.

Now a hockey fan can enjoy any play from any game in high-def and watch the action in the palm of his or her hand 24/7. In the 1940s and early 1950s fans followed their teams by radio and in the newspapers. Other than press photos and the odd short newsreel or film, there were no pictures (still or moving) and so no replays, no slow-motion. *In the Pressure of the Moment* tracks not only the tension felt by goalies (no facemasks, rare substitutions), but also by the press who had just one chance—one moment to take in the action.

Years later McNeil would describe the feeling of losing that Game Seven on a fluky overtime goal: "It's like the end of the world!" *In the Pressure of the Moment* marks how our experience of the NHL has changed from the time of McNeil's career to the modern spectacle of today, roughly during the last sixty-five years. This period includes what might be called the golden age of sports photography and the beginning of the NHL on television. David McNeil explores cultural and historical aspects of Hockey in his father's career: including journalism, home life, and the realities of professional sports.

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The literary road has been very well traveled, but it's safe to say that there has never been a hockey book quite like *In the Pressure of the Moment*. A cultural critique, a meditation on the art and iconography of sports photography, and also a son's memoir of his hockey-playing father, it is at once scholarly and moving. You may know the name Gerry McNeil, Montreal Canadiens' goaltender, Stanley Cup winner, and supporting player on some of the greatest teams ever assembled, but after reading this you will come to fully appreciate him, and his hockey-playing kin, who are so much a part of the fabric of our national game.

— Stephen Brunt, *Sportsnet*