

Capturing hockey in cartoons



NICK FONDA

his wife, Caroline, it was in Knowlton with the reception held at Owl's Head. In the summers, you might bump into him kayaking on Brome Lake or cycling around it, while in the winters you might meet him at Sutton or Orford, likely on a run marked with a double black diamond.

Beyond the Townships, statistically-minded hockey buffs know Don Weekes as the author of 34 books including Hockey Hall of Fame Book of Trivia and Hockey's Top 100: The Game's Greatest Goals.

"I learned to skate when I was four or five," Don says, "and I started playing hockey about the same time. At the beginning, these were pick-up games, but I did play three years of organized hockey until the age of 15. After that, I took up downhill skiing. But I still play a couple of games of pick-up hockey every winter."

At 17, Don contemplated becoming an architect and he studied Civil Technology at Dawson College, which

led to four summers spent with survey crews in the Yukon. However, when he started his studies at Concordia University it was in Psychology. His real interest though was in student radio, and, with the others in the station, his work was publicly recognized by the University.

With an award in hand, he landed a summer job at CJAD Radio.

"It was baptism by fire," he says. "I was put to work on a show called Sounds Like Montreal. It was a mid-day show that ran from 9 a.m. till 2 p.m. It was an open-line show, and we always had seven or eight guests. I had to hustle."

Still, Don got along well at CJAD and he worked there for the next three years before moving to CFCF Radio, a posting that transitioned into a job as a producer at CTV. In addition to public affairs programs, he also produced baseball shows and, alongside Dick Irvin, hockey programs. During the course of his career, his work was

publicly recognized, as it had been at Concordia.

His writing career began with an idea that came to him during a visit to a bookstore in 1992.

"I was surprised that there weren't any books on hockey trivia," Don says. "The next day, I spoke to a friend who is a book distributor, and three days later, I got a phone call from Greystone Books in Vancouver."

Described as "hockey's history seen through the unfiltered lens of graphic satire, commentary, and draughtsmanship by Canada's most prominent cartoonists and illustrators," Picturing the Game is a polar opposite to all of Don's previous books. While they were small, 140-page paperbacks, Picturing the Game is an inch-thick, hard-cover, coffee-table book that measures 11" x 9" and is richly illustrated with 460 images throughout its 408 pages.

Local Sports

The cartoon was prompted by a convict who escaped custody while attending a hockey game.

Hockey in cartoons

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It was also a very different writing challenge.

“The trivia books,” Don explains, “were written more easily. I’d accumulate data for a year and then write the book in two months. The entries were short, typically the narrative arc was 300 words, about a page. Picturing the Game is divided thematically into 20 chapters, and I had to learn to write story lines of 5,000 words. It also ended up taking seven years to write, five more than I had thought it would.”

As a coffee-table book, Picturing the Game can be opened at random and always reveals an eye-catching or intriguing cartoon or illustration with an accompanying caption. Depending on the page, the visual might date back to the late 19th century or be a contemporary cartoon from Aislin.

The reader with more time will find that there is a lot of meat in Picturing the Game. As it’s not arranged chronologically, the chapters can be perused according to the reader’s interest, for example, violence in hockey is dealt with in Chapter 6, entitled Bloodlines, while the hockey fan still coming to terms with the Canada-Soviet Summit Series of 1972 can read about it in Chapter 17, The Showdown.

Unlike Don’s earlier books, published either by Greystone or by Firefly Books in Toronto, his newest one comes from McGill-Queen’s University Press, one of Canada’s most prestigious publishers. The book’s first dozen pages provide an illustrated timeline of hockey, from the 1800s to 2020. The book’s last dozen pages are a glossary and an index. Picturing the Game is a scholarly book, but

accessibly so. It’s dense with factual material but everything is presented in a clear, straightforward manner.

On occasion, Picturing the Game has flashes of the imaginative, almost poetic language of sports wordsmiths like Red Fischer or Jack Todd. For example, in Chapter 3, which traces hockey’s monetization and migration south, Don writes, “The baseballing of hockey began almost from the moment the steel blades of pro players hissed across American ice.”

“I knew nothing about cartooning before I began this book,” says Don. “Growing up I read Mad Magazine and later National Lampoon. Then, at some point, I discovered the cartoon’s potential for satire and social commentary.”

“As the book came together,” he continues, “there were times that a story I was familiar with would lead me to a brilliant cartoon, and other times that a cartoon would lead me to a story I was unaware of.”

The book’s introduction begins with a story and cartoon that have a Townships connection. It shows a couple passing in front of a prison as dozens of inmates, in striped uniforms, traipse out the prison gate. The caption reads, “It must be Hockey Night in Canada.”

The cartoon was prompted by a convict who escaped custody while attending a hockey game.

Don writes, “I knew little of the 1973 story of two prisoners out on temporary-absence passes from Cowansville Medium Security Penitentiary in Quebec. As part of their social reintegration program, they had somehow secured tickets to attend a Stanley Cup game between Montreal

and Philadelphia at the Montreal Forum. During overtime, one Robert Moisan, a twenty-five-year-old holdup man told his guard he had to call his mother. As one might expect, Moisan never returned.”

It was this cartoon and its backstory that inspired the idea of the book.

The book’s most remarkable story—for me—is about a hockey riot that occurred in Richmond in February of 1907 following a game between Richmond supporters and fans who had come by train from Waterville to cheer on their team. I’ve been collecting local lore for decades, even served as president of the Richmond County Historical Society, and I had never heard that story before. Yet, there it is in Don’s book as covered by La Presse.

“I was very lucky with this project,” Don says, “and I had a lot of help from a lot of people.”

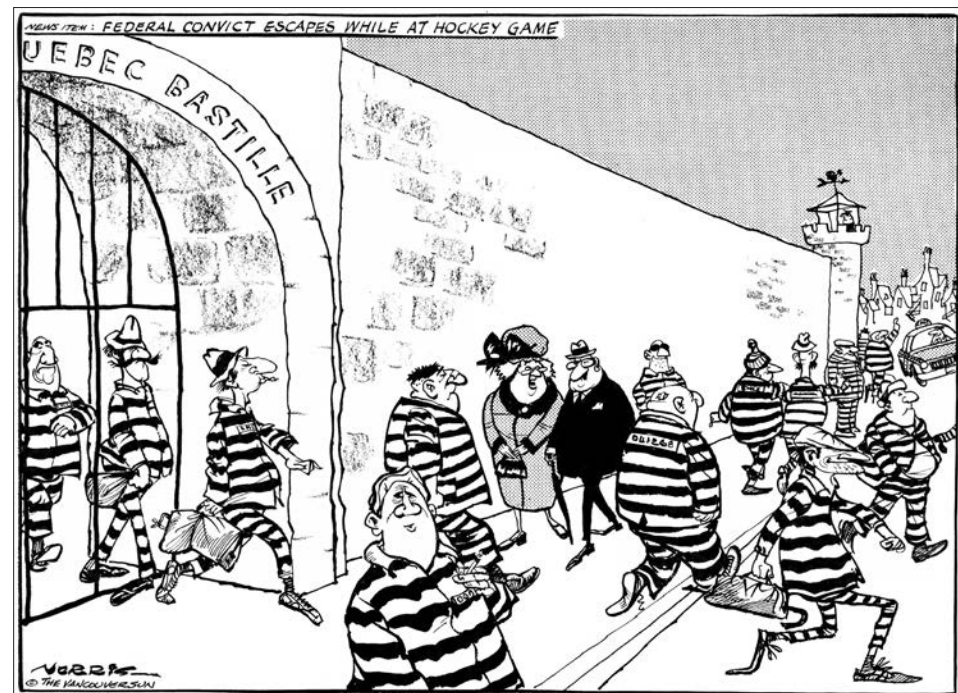
In fact, the Acknowledgements at the end of the book take five pages.

Picturing the Game is a beautiful book with an eye-catching dust jacket:

an illustration from 1949 showing Bill Ezinicki and Maurice Richard in the penalty box after a dust-up. The book is both a momentary visual distraction, as you’d expect from a coffee-table book, and a serious dissertation on something that is more than Canada’s national sport. Quite likely, for hockey buffs, it will serve for years as a reference book. Arguably, it’s one of the most significant books on hockey since Ken Dryden published The Game exactly 30 years ago.

The book is being released in early October to coincide with the start of the NHL’s hockey season. For more information on the book, go to www.picturingthegame.ca.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have to add that Don Weekes has been a family friend for more than half a century. Furthermore, my son was one of the researchers who contributed to Don’s book and my brother was one of Don’s editors. It was through them that I watched Picturing the Game slowly make its way to its publication.



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“It must be Hockey Night in Canada.”



THIS WEEKEND

FRIDAY

WOMEN'S SOCCER VS MCGILL 7 PM

SUNDAY

WOMEN'S RUGBY VS OTTAWA 1 PM

📍 COULTER FIELD

EXHIBITION ACTION

BASKETBALL - THURSDAY & FRIDAY

HOCKEY - SATURDAY & SUNDAY



GAITERS.CA/TICKETS