

Block Party

The Pit

"We've got a great team here, you could almost have a dynasty, but you two are gonna screw it up."

An admittedly drunk Phil Esposito to Blackhawks' coach Billy Reay and general manager Tommy Ivan at the 1967 post-season wrap party after the Hawks had lost to Toronto in the Stanley Cup semi-finals (at the time the opening round) four games to two.

Whether fair or not, you cannot tell the story of Hubert "Pit" Martin without mentioning one of hockey's most-lopsided trades. On May 15, 1967 Blackhawks' general manager Tommy Ivan traded Phil Esposito, right winger Ken Hodge, and forward Fred Stanfield to Boston in exchange for Martin, minor-league goaltender Jack Norris and defenseman Gilles Marotte.

Ken Hodge was one of the bigger players of his day, and at six-foot-two, two hundred and ten pounds was looked at by the Blackhawks as the team's enforcer. In Boston, he skated regularly with Phil Esposito on the Bruins' top line and quickly became a superstar and clutch playoff performer. In Chicago, Hodge was a marginal player. Over nine seasons in Boston, he scored 289 goals and averaged a point-a-game.

Fred Stanfield was supposed to be a throw-in from the Blackhawks' side. Instead, he quickly transformed into an all-around utility player in Boston and helped lead the Bruins to Stanley Cup victories in 1970 and 1972 as part of the team's second line with Johnny Bucyk and Johnny McKenzie. Stanfield scored at least twenty goals in all six seasons he was a Bruin.

Just as Phil Esposito predicted, Tommy Ivan did "screw it up", and in bombastic fashion. Even though Martin was a very good Blackhawk, most observers feel the Blackhawks never recovered from that deal.

Ivan though wasn't the only one who wanted Esposito gone. In fact, it was also Arthur and Bill Wirtz, who assumed the role of president in 1966 after James Norris passed away, who didn't like Esposito's style of play (big guy but not physical), nor his attitude, and pushed Ivan to move the future Hall of Famer out of town.

Marotte was a decent blue liner and remained a Blackhawk through the 1969-70 season. Norris played just ten games in an Indianhead sweater before becoming a mainstay in the WHA in the mid-seventies.

So, for Ivan, the Wirtz's, and Blackhawks' fans, all they were left with was Martin. What they didn't know was they had just traded one cocky know-it-all center for another.

Jacques Hubert Martin was born on December 9, 1943 in the town of Noranda, Quebec. Years later he was nicknamed "Pit" after a quirky French language comic book character some say he resembled.

After the 1968-69 season, one where the Hawks failed to qualify for the playoffs, Martin, in an interview with The Hockey News, blasted his teammates and the organization saying only three players "wear their uniforms with any desire to win." He also criticized the team itself and unofficial team captain Stan Mikita for perceived "special privileges" awarded to stars like Mikita and Bobby Hull.

At the start of the following season's training camp, Mikita approached Martin in jest and quickly coined the name "Perfect Pit" which was Mikita's way of both addressing the issue and putting Martin in his place at the same time. Those 'special privileges' however disappeared and the entire controversy was muted.

Mikita was a character on and off the ice. Martin was quiet, unassuming yet confident and unwavering when he did speak. His play reflected those characteris-

tics and he was the perfect compliment behind Mikita as the team's second center for better part of a decade. Chicago wouldn't miss the playoffs again for 28 years.

Upon completion of the 1969-70 season, Martin was awarded the Bill Masterton Trophy for dedication to the game of hockey. He called the honor "the most important trophy I'll ever receive." The line of Martin, between wingers Dennis Hull and Jim Pappin was arguably the NHL's best second-line that year and Martin finished third on the team in scoring with thirty goals and thirty-three assists.

The trio was soon given the "MPH" moniker and Dennis Hull reached forty goals for the second time the next season. The threesome would remain together largely until Pappin was traded to California for Joey Johnston after the 1974-75 season.

During his career Martin served as president of the player's association and was a pioneer in advocating players wearing helmets. Martin campaigned for a mandatory helmet rule during the 70's. He and Mikita were two of only a few Blackhawks at the time who did wear helmets.

Injuries plagued the latter half of Martin's Blackhawks' career. He underwent an emergency appendectomy during the 1974-75 season that cost him ten games. The next season he led the Blackhawks in scoring for the only time in his career.

His 1976-77 season was beset by injuries, and though he played through most of those, his production dropped sharply on a pitiful Hawks team that was led in scoring by Ivan Boldirev. The following season Martin played in only seven games before being traded to Vancouver for future considerations, who later turned out to be Tony Esposito's future successor Murray Bannerman.

After two seasons in Vancouver, Hubert "Pit" Martin hung up his skates and pursued his passion for flying, becoming a licensed pilot. He retired to Windsor, Ontario where he managed several busi-

nesses including bar, restaurant, and a swimming pool service.

On Sunday November 30, 2008, Martin was snowmobiling with a friend on the icy waters of Lake Kanasuta, traveling to his home on an island on the lake near Rouyn-Noranda, in the northwestern part of Quebec.

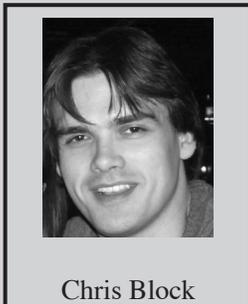
Martin was trailing his companion when a patch of ice caved and swallowed Martin and his vehicle. A passerby assisted the companion in attempting to save Martin but they were unable to locate him. A rescue helicopter airlifted and transported the friend to a nearby hospital but found no sight of Martin either. Martin was officially presumed dead the next day. He was nine days shy of his 65th birthday. After two days of recovery efforts, Martin's body was found in the lake in the afternoon on December 2nd.

Martin was a four-time All-Star (1971, 1972, 1973, 1974) and still ranks 10th all-time in goals scored (243) by a Blackhawk, 8th in assists (384) and 7th in points (627).

If not for the dubious distinction of essentially being the man traded for Phil Esposito and igniting a brief Bruins' dynasty, and also being stuck behind some pretty good players (Hull, Mikita) in Chicago, Martin just might have been one of the most-beloved Blackhawks of the seventies.

Pit Martin played every game just as he lived his life; with passion, assurance and gusto. Tonight was to be his night, along with linemates Dennis Hull and Jim Pappin to revel in the appreciation of an organization and town that never truly did afford him that acceptance. He deserved it. He still does.

ChrisBlock@TheThirdManIn.com



Chris Block

MEET PATRICK KANE

Saturday March 14, 2009

Ashken Place

341 W. 75th Place

WILMINGTON, IL

Sports Collectible and Autograph Show
March 14th 6:30 to 4:00pm

March 15th 6:30 to 3:00pm

Saturday - 14th

Patrick Kane - 1:00pm to 2:30pm

Patrick Sharp - 10am to 3pm

Dennis Hull - 11am to 1:30pm

Jim Pappin - 11am to 1:30pm

Sunday - 15th

Tony Esposito - 11am to 1pm

Phil Esposito - 11am to 1pm

WWW.BLACKHAWKSONLINE.COM

Admission
\$5.00 Adults
Free - 7 & Under

For more information
Call 708-499-8444
or 861-894-7316



If you'd like to contribute to our silly rag, please send submissions to committedindian@gmail.com. All guest contributors will have a chance to win a free jersey from Triple Threat Sports!

THE COMMITTED INDIAN

We're freezing our ass off so you can laugh yours off