INTERVIEW WITH BILL WHITE

After playing his junior hockey for the Toronto Marlboros of the Ontario Hockey Association, **Bill White** turned professional in 1960. The Los Angeles Kings of the NHL acquired the rights to White in the 1967 NHL expansion, and White was the Kings' best defenceman out of the gate, leading the team in scoring both full years he played for them. During the 1970 season, White was traded to the powerful Chicago Black Hawks, for whom he would play the remainder of his career. Paired with rushing defenceman Pat Stapleton, they formed one of the greatest defensive pairings of the decade, and despite recurring minor injuries, White averaged nearly 30 assists a season in his five full seasons with Chicago. During that time, he was named to the NHL's Second All-Star squad on defence in 1972, 1973 and 1974, as well as being named to play in the All-Star Game for six consecutive seasons between 1969 and 1974. He was also a member of the Canadian team in the 1972 Summit Series against the Soviets, playing eight games. White finished his NHL career with 50 goals, 215 assists and 265 points in 604 games, with 495 penalty minutes. At the time of his retirement, even though he had played only six full seasons with the Hawks, he was in the top five of all-time Black Hawk defence scorers.

ON THE TEAM SELECTION, ON TEAM CANADA, ON THE RUSSIANS

I saw an article in the *Toronto Telegram* where they polled people on who should be part of the team; fans could vote, in a similar fashion as with the All Stars Game. Then it was up to Harry Sinden and Alan Eagleson to make up the team.

I was at the cottage in August 1972 and I received a call to participate in an eight game series whose aim was to promote friendship between Canada and Russia. Each player would be guaranteed to play at least one game, and the training camp was starting shortly after, at the Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto.

The Series was not creating as much hype before as it did after; we didn't know how big it would get.

The training camp lasted two weeks. I was never a fan of training camps, especially those which required me to leave my cottage during my time off! But this was the best training camp I had attended; it was intense, focused on conditioning. Usually the camps focused on skating, but the exercises we had to do for this one were completely different, like running up and down the stairs at the Maple Leafs Garden.

What was weird at the camp was sitting right beside former enemies; not much was said in the first few days at the camp.

ON HIS BEST MEMORIES OF THE SERIES, ON THE ICE

I didn't play the first game of the Series. From the bench, I could see that we 'looked good' during the first period, but after the second period in the dressing room, it was obvious we 'weren't good enough'. The Russians were in a far better shape than we were; we were constantly trying to catch our breath. But then again, we never predicted a 'sweep' like the media did. We knew we could never underestimate an opponent, and we didn't.

I was playing defense during the second game; it turned out to be a big game, a 'feel good' victory. Had this one ended differently, it would have been a whole other series, that's for sure. Then we went on to play in Vancouver, which was a disappointment for the fans (and for us of course). That's when Phil Esposito made his famous speech.

We then left for Sweden and played their national team for two games. It was then that I noticed we were getting better. The passing was crisper, the shots were stronger. Lines had been changed, and we also have to take into account that we knew each other a lot better.

About the last game: After Paul Henderson's goal, I was just in awe. Paul had just fallen, but had picked himself up; I still have no idea how he managed to score. He scored, we all ran to cheer him, we were ecstatic. Then, as we were skating back to continue the game with 34 seconds left, I started getting butterflies. You know, before you start an important game, you get those butterflies every time, which usually go away after you step on the ice. This time, they came back stronger for that 34 seconds because I was on the ice! I went to speak with my colleague to see what we would do. We didn't know if the Russians had a play for this specific situation. We started playing, the puck came inside the blue line and I was thinking, do we go all out or do we play it safe? There was an icing risk, but someone caught it, I can't remember who did but I'd like to say 'Thank you'!

There was a man with a plastic horn who couldn't stop honking. You could see he was getting on the soldiers' nerves. In fact, he was eventually escorted out of the building! I still get chills thinking about the two to three thousand fans that came to Russia to cheer us on. What a sense of patriotism! We were half way around the world and Canadians were there to show their support. I still get people coming up to me and say "Do you remember me Bill, I was in Russia in 1972". We didn't realize how big the victory was… we weren't in Canada but in a dressing room

in Russia. But afterwards we started getting telegrams of congratulations and realized Canada was celebrating with us. I sort of wish I was in Canada then, just to be able to get time off to watch a hockey game!

ON HIS BEST MEMORIES OF THE SERIES, OFF THE ICE

For us, it was a chance to visit a country we would have never visited otherwise. It was definitely a clash of culture. I remember getting off the bus with the late Gary Bergman and giving chewing gum to some kids on the streets. We saw a soldier who pretty much put his boots on the gum packets, keeping the kids from grabbing them. We started swearing at him… I think he got the point. Another mishap with the soldiers is when we decided to cross the Red Square instead of going around to go see Lenin's tomb. You weren't allowed to cross because some parts of the Square were untouchable; blood from the revolution had been spilled there. But we ran across, made it before the soldiers caught us.

We stayed at the Intourist hotel. There was not much variety in the types of food we could eat. We were all longing for a good hamburger. One day, Patty Stapleton arrived at the hotel and told us that they had just gone back from a Chinese restaurant. That night some people decided to go to the Bolshoi Ballet and others to the restaurant… but there was no restaurant, it was a prank. I myself enjoyed the ballet, which was everything people said it would be. We were lucky my wife and I because we sat beside a lady who spoke English and she translated the whole story for us.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SERIES ON HOCKEY

We learned a lot from the Russians and they learned a lot from us, for example our passing and skating skills. And for us, this was a wakeup call as well, we needed to work and couldn't take our skills for granted. The Russians gave us credit, they said 'You can't take away a Canadian's heart. They always come back at you.' The Series itself opened the door to Europeans to come and play in North America. Scouts began to visit countries like Russia to find good hockey players, and for them it was a great opportunity they could not have back home.

ON WHAT HE TAKES PERSONALLY FROM THE EXPERIENCE

What I drew from this experience was the high sense of patriotism that Canadians had, and how this experience brought us all together. Even in a more personal manner, it was difficult to play against these guys after the Series. It was different; there was a connection there that could not be taken away.

ON WHAT HE THINKS CANADIANS SHOULD REMEMBER FROM THE EXPERIENCE

It's a terrible cliché, but you know what, Canada is a great country. I'd say, Give it your all and your country will give it back. It does. It's always worth it to do something for your country.