

Max Bentley, A Prairie Hero

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Max Bentley was born March 1, 1920 in Delisle, Saskatchewan; he died January 19, 1984 a few miles up the road in Saskatoon. He was the most outstanding hockey and baseball playing member of a famous Saskatchewan sporting family. The athletic exploits of he and his brothers are legend in the rinks and on the diamonds of the Canadian prairies. Delisle, Rosetown, Drumheller, Chicago, Calgary, Toronto, New York and Saskatoon were the communities where Max performed his hockey artistry. His athletic gifts were at a level that set him apart. He became a prairie hero. Those who remember his hockey skills recall how his “feathery moves,” superb stick handling and famous wrist shot were in a class of their own. Though less known at the national and international levels, his ability with a baseball bat was for many years a source of prairie pride and comment.

Barry Broadfoot’s writing brought forward the import of baseball in the provinces of Western Canada during the depression years. “Baseball! God if you came from the Prairies you had to remember baseball. There was nothing else to do . . .” From Victoria Day, the twenty-fourth of May, through Labor Day there would be town sports days and baseball tournaments. Swift Current, Weyburn Brandon, Lacombe, Wetaskawin, Lethbridge; each centre had their tournament and local favorites. Many of the outstanding hockey players from the professional leagues would return home and spend their summers on the baseball fields of Western Canada. No team was more popular or better known in the vast region than

the Bentley's team, the Delisle Gems. Max Bentley was both the top draw and the top performer for this touring team.

Professional hockey was however the setting for the best remembered performances of Max, who the press nicknamed the Dipsy-Doodle Dandy from Delisle. He began his professional career in 1940, when he joined brother Doug, with the Chicago Black Hawks. The Bentley boys were teamed with Bill Mosienko, from Winnipeg, to form the Pony line. Many honors came to this line and to Max during his Chicago tenure. It was after winning the league scoring title for two consecutive years (1946,1947) that the Toronto team indicated great interest in acquiring his services. Conn Smythe, the Toronto Maple Leaf general manager, traded five outstanding hockey players to acquire the centre ice skills of Max Bentley. The year was 1948 and the trade resulted in the "Leafs" winning the league and the National Hockey Championship Stanley Cup.

At a party in a Detroit nightclub following the championship series between the Leafs and the Detroit Red Wings, Smythe toasted his team as "the greatest ever." The Maple Leafs of this era were the toast of Toronto and the rest of English speaking Canada.

The gospel of hockey in the late forties and the early fifties was spread from Maple Leaf Gardens to Western Canada by Canada's best known voice, that of Foster Hewitt. One player oft mentioned to the people was Max Bentley. This talented performer from a small farming town had first made his mark in the West and later in the urban centres of Canada and the United States. He continued to play until 1956 and then returned to his rural roots to live out his life and be a revered disciple of prairie sport. He had lived and fulfilled the prairie boy's dream.



Tom Jable looks more like a Texas Ranger than the newly elected NASSH President.