

Clark among four added to Leafs Legends Row



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Ottawa Senators defenceman Erik Karlsson, left to right, with Brad Conacher, son of former Maple Leafs player Charlie Conacher, along with former Maple Leafs players Frank Mahovlich, Wendel Clark, Casey Kelly, daughter of former Maple Leafs player Red Kelly, and Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly. (THE CANADIAN PRESS/Aaron Vincent Elkaim)

TORONTO - Nearly 60 years since Red Kelly seamlessly switched from defence to centre and helped the Maple Leafs win four Stanley Cups, Frank Mahovlich is still amazed how he did it.

The 89-year-old Kelly was just released from hospital on Friday and wanted to attend Saturday's Legends Row announcement to banter with the Big M, but the latter made sure Kelly wasn't forgotten. The two stars of the Leafs' last golden era were honoured with Wendel Clark and Charlie Conacher. Kelly's daughter Casey represented him, while Charlie's son Brad stepped in for the late 'Big Bomber'.

"He came to us as a (Norris Trophy) defenceman," Mahovlich said of Kelly. "I don't know what (coach) Punch Imlach saw in him, but he put him between myself and Bob Nevin and boy, we really caught on. It seemed like we'd played all our lives together.

"I played 18 years and I look back and see Gordie Howe tried to be a defenceman. (His coach) Ned Harkness said 'you'll last another 40 years'. But it didn't work, he couldn't turn around. Bobby Orr gave it a little try in Boston (switching from defence to forward). He looked out of place, it didn't fit.

"But when Red came to Toronto and went up centre ice, it was lightning. We went on and won four Cups.

I have some great memories, my first game against the Canadiens, my first goal against Glenn Hall. But I want to mention Red. I'm sorry he's not here, but he'll be the statue beside me."

Mahovlich, who nearly became the first 50-goal Leaf, made his own mark of course. Now he's pulling for this group of Leafs to end a 50-year Cup drought in the next few years.

"When I get into a taxi in Toronto, everyone is positive about this team. I think they're headed in the right direction. I can remember our club was in trouble, we hadn't made the playoffs in two or three years. When I joined, there was Bob Pulford and Carl Brewer and all of a sudden, it was there, it was magic.

"I get the same feeling about this club. When I saw Auston Matthews score those first four goals (in the season opener against Ottawa) I could identify. I did that. I hope it keeps up. They have to make a few more moves and then they'll be there."

The next Leaf to join Legend's Row will have to come from the millennial era as club president Brendan Shanahan says there is no more room in the original team bench concept after the next four are added.

"From the historical committee's perspective, these are the final members represented in the first 100 years," Shanahan said. "You never know what can happen, but the intention is that it's full. It is our hope to extend the bench to some of these players just embarking on their NHL careers. We haven't left one spot open - it's open for someone to earn it. We'd be thrilled to death to get some architects down there and extend the bench."

Clark, the fourth post-expansion player to get a place on Legends Row joked, "I feel like a fourth liner with all those guys." But he also received the loudest cheers in the pre-game introduction, more recognition of how much a win-starved franchise appreciated the captain's efforts.

"Wendel has done so much for the Leafs and continues to do so much," Shanahan said.

ABOUT THE LATEST INDUCTEES

The Maple Leafs have just about filled up Legends row with the addition of Charlie Conacher, Red Kelly, Frank Mahovlich and Wendel Clark. The next addition could have to wait until they win a Stanley Cup.

With the new names bringing the total to 14, the 30-foot granite team bench concept cept will keep one spot open for a player they hope will prove worthy in the next generation, possibly part of a Stanley Cup winner.

The four newcomers, announced before Saturday's game against the Senators, join Teeder Kennedy, Darryl Sittler, Johnny Bower, Borje Salming, George Armstrong, Syl Apps, Mats Sundin, Dave Keon, Turk Broda and Tim Horton.

WENDEL CLARK

LW Wendel Clark 1985-1994, '96-'98, '99-00 608 GP, 260-181-441, 1,535 PIM

From the dark days of the 1980s, fans saw the light when Clark would score and fight. The No. 1 overall pick, at a time when some top prospects didn't want to join the Harold Ballard circus here, the grain farmer's son from Kelvington, Sask., was a throwback to tough Western Canadians who craved the chance to play for the famous Leafs.

Clark didn't just snap in goals, with his record of 34 being challenged by another No. 1 this season, Auston Matthews, he made mincemeat out of bigger men in most of his lightning-quick fights and body checked like a train. There was no big grandstanding after the carnage, just Clark calmly going to the penalty box or the bench, right past the opposition which rarely chirped him. He instilled courage in teammates and helped the Leafs hold their own in the heavyweight Chuck Norris Division.

Humble by nature, he nonetheless became a forceful team captain and fan favourite. The Leafs gradually turned the tide by the early'90s and the Pat Burns-coached team was fighting for the conference title. Clark paid a price for his physical style with nagging injuries, but not before producing a 46-goal season, enhancing his value in a trade for another future captain, franchise scoring leader Mats Sundin.

Clark was a New York Islander when he came back in a 1996 trade. As he watched a Leaf trainer scrape the NY logo off his helmet he remarked: "I never got Toronto out of my system". Clark would depart again, only to be re-acquired by another legend behind the Leafs bench, Pat Quinn.

When he said goodbye in a tearful ceremony in 2001, he was the first captain in 30 years since George Armstrong to retire as a Leaf.

Clark has spent the last few years as a team ambassador, going to all corners of Canada where he remains instantly recognizable. Though he never won a Stanley Cup, people knew it was not for lack of trying.

CHARLIE CONACHER

RW Charlie Conacher 1929-38 326 GP, 200-124-324, 411 PIM

Many oldtimers wonder why the team's first superstar, from Toronto's 'first hockey family', who scored the first Leaf goal in Gardens history and was on the first Gardens' Cup team, was not among the first to go on Legends Row.

But the Big Bomber's spirit didn't have to come too far from the ice rink at Jesse Ketchum Public School where the famous Conacher brothers launched their hockey, lacrosse and football 1960-67 careers. Charlie, also one of the first Marlies juniors to graduate to the Leafs, would lead the NHL in A scoring touch and a touch of class. scoring five times and formed The Kid Line with That's what Leonard 'Red' Kelly brought when the Busher Jackson and Joe Primeau. Their exploits Leafs acquired him in 1960. Punch Imlach had built got some credit as the inspiration to build a bigger a Cup contender to that point with mostly homegrown house for the team at Maple Leaf Gardens.

With his feared shot - no curved sticks in that in the minors, but Kelly was an established star era - Conacher would record three, four and with the Detroit Red Wings, already a winner of four five-goal games in his career. He was sought after Cups.

A contract dispute with the Wings led to a for endorsements and the city once held a Charlie failed trade with the Rangers, with Imlach quickly Conacher Day. But he was not fussy about fame stepping into the void to make Kelly a Leaf. and his children would find all manner of hockey Ironically, Kelly had come through the Leaf treasures stuffed away around the house over the hockey factory at St. Michael's College years before, years.

The puck from his first goal at the Gardens but was not deemed NHL worthy. Imlach not only was an afterthought said son Brad, a Toronto gave him a new start, he put him in a new position, stockbroker.

"It was always on the wall in the family room," winner one year) to centre, where he asked to Brad said. "Very little of his stuff was (displayed or neutralize the great Jean Beliveau in Montreal. sold to collectors), but you couldn't go anywhere in Kelly was a star on the ice and had ambitions off Toronto where they didn't know him.

"It's a funny thing. He's been gone about 50 Member of Parliament for York West, while keeping years now, but I'm still astounded by some things his night job. His support of the new Canadian flag that make me realize just how much he must have brought him into conflict with traditionalist Conn meant to the city, the team and the country."

Charlie's nephew Brian bookends the Conacher Kelly won another Lady Byng with the Leafs and Cups at the Gardens by playing on the '67 team.

RED KELLY

C Red Kelly 196-67 470 GP, 119-232-351, 74 PIM

A scoring touch and a touch of class.

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Smythe, the former Leaf manager Charlie's nephew Brian bookends the Conacher Kelly won another Lady Byng with the Leafs and Cups at the Gardens by playing on the '67 team. was one of the first to have a table hockey game talent and players he had coached elsewhere house for the team at Maple Leaf Gardens. With his feared shot - no curved sticks in that in the minors, but Kelly was an established star era - Conacher would record three, four and with the Detroit Red Wings, already a winner of four five-goal games in his career. He was sought after Cups. A contract dispute with the Wings led to a for endorsements and the city once held a Charlie failed trade with the Rangers, with Imlach quickly Conacher Day. But he was not fussy about fame stepping into the void to make Kelly a Leaf. and his children would find all manner of hockey Ironically, Kelly had come through the Leaf treasures stuffed away around the house over the hockey factory at St. Michael's College years before, years. The puck from his first goal at the Gardens but was not deemed NHL worthy. Imlach not only was an afterthought said son Brad, a Toronto gave him a new start, he put him in a new position, stockbroker. switching from defence (he was a Norris Trophy it as well. Between 1962-65, he served as a Liberal C Red Kelly with his picture. His 55 playoff points included 36 in the four springs the Leafs won the Cup in the '60s. Kelly's story did not end with his playing days, after a stint coaching the expansion Los Angeles Kings, he came back to the Leafs for an eventful turn behind the bench under the Ballard regime and had three hard-fought playoff series with the Philadelphia Flyers.

Kelly came up with Pyramid Power in 1976, hanging them all over the dressing room, which if nothing else took pressure off the Leafs as that particular post-season meeting against the Broad St. Bullies got ugly. Kelly had a number of business ventures after hockey, including a bowling alley and a job in the aerospace industry.

FRANK MAHOVLICH

LW Frank Mahovlich 1956-68 720 GP, 296-301-597, 782 PIM

Frank Mahovlich, the legendary Leaf leprechaun King Clancy once said, reminded him of Conacher, so perhaps it's fitting the speedy, hard shooting wingers will be enshrined on Legends Row together.

The Big M also joins former St. Michael's College teammate and Leaf linemate Red Kelly. Mahovlich won four Cups and nearly became the first Leaf to score 50 goals, but everything didn't go smoothly. He had a sometimes stormy relationship with Imlach, who was always trying to get more from a playuer he deemed was not trying enough. Others thought Mahovlich's talent was just so natural that it created the false impression he wasn't working hard.

But Imlach could not argue with results, four Cups, a member of the first or second all-star team six times and the 1958 Calder Trophy. From 1961 onward, he had at least 30 goals on four occasions. After he flirted with 50, there was a contract issue and the Blackhawks tried to purchase him for the then-unheard of price of \$1 million. The offer came after a night of drinking with Chicago and Toronto management, including Ballard, then one of the Leaf directors.

The cheque was cut, but saner heads prevailed in the morning and the angry Hawks were denied a chance to pair Mahovlich and Bobby Hull. Mahovlich stayed in Toronto where he got his new contract and respect for him as a player and a man increased as the decade unfolded.