

## *'He Shoots! . . . He Scores!!!': Toronto's New Hockey Hall of Fame is a Winner*

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'He shoots! . . . He scores!!!'. Virtually all people in Canada, as well as those in many other parts of the world, recognize these words as the climactic shout of a radio or television announcer when a goal is scored during a hockey game. For many decades, radio and television broadcasts have carried these words to millions of people who somehow share with professional hockey players the challenge of competition, the thrill of winning or the agony of defeat. Hockey, in its many professional, amateur and backyard variations, has become an integrated and vital part of the identity of a large number of North Americans. The newly opened Hockey Hall of Fame, located in Toronto, Canada, is a museum which effectively honours the gods of sport in a way that is both personal and transpersonal, and has done so with a flair from which many museums can learn a great deal.

For more than 30 years in Toronto, the Hockey Hall of Fame has been a shrine which housed objects celebrating the human achievements of a very popular sport. It functioned as a museum with an extensive collection of artifacts, including pucks, trophies, sweaters, sticks and the like. However, the function of this shrine changed dramatically in June 1993. At that point, the Hockey Hall of Fame moved to a new home in an historic bank building, located in the centre of the city. The shrine function, which encouraged visitors to experience archetypal aspects of sport – challenge, hero quest, realizing one's potential, etc. – evolved from a largely static facility full of objects to a centre dedicated to all of the living aspects of hockey. As such, this museum has become an even more powerful place where individuals can come and pay homage to the giants of hockey – the men whose skills have inspired youth to strive to develop their own potentials. It continues to be a place where memories of personal challenges, wins and defeats are conjured up

and often shared with others. But now, more than ever before, the Hockey Hall of Fame pays respect to the myriad ways that individuals integrate hockey into their personal lives.

As one enters the museum, which has been heavily financed by major corporations, visitors are made aware that this high-tech facility is organized into a series of 'zones'. First is the 'Great Moments Zone', which presents a video-projected, wall-sized selection of exciting hockey moments from television archives. In some of the video clips, one is captivated by the excitement and intensity of the sport when it is played with great skill. Other footage, however, features humorous 'bloopers' in which great professional focus fails to hit its mark. A 'History Zone' presents artifacts and information on the origins and development of hockey.

One particularly popular area is the 'Dressing Room Zone'. Here, visitors are invited into a full-scale reproduction of the Montreal Canadians dressing room. Visitors can touch authentic clothing and equipment while they watch a 12-minute video (filmed in the actual dressing room) of the Montreal players preparing to go onto the ice for a National Hockey League game. As the video ends with a call for the players to enter the arena, a set of double doors spring open and visitors exit towards what would be the ice rink. The feeling of 'being there' is further conjured up with a blast of cold air, rubberized flooring underfoot and a recording of an enthusiastic crowd. A sophisticated sports medicine display, complete with multi-media exhibit technology, extends the experience of the Dressing Room Zone. It is truly a multi-sensory, imaginative experience.

In the 'International Zone' a complex, interactive video-disc/audio presentation offers insights into the look of hockey in Austria, Japan, the United States and Canada. The nine-monitor television installation is supported with a large satellite map of the world that is animated with a laser beam, synchronized to the interactive display. Another part of this zone is dedicated to exploring women in hockey – specifically examining the development of the Women's World Hockey Championships.

The 'North American Zone' offers an in-depth look at the many amateur and professional hockey leagues that operate on this continent. Using interactive, multi-media technology, along with a large map of Canada and the USA, visitors can access information about the many variations of hockey found in this part of the world.

A special feature of this zone is that people from all over the continent are invited to submit their team photographs and logos for inclusion in an ever-growing visual database, which showcases some of the intensely personal ways in which individuals make the sport of hockey part of their own lives.

A 'Household Hockey Zone' pays tribute to the grassroots of hockey – the Saturday mornings in which whole neighbourhoods of parents and children wake up in the dark and trudge over to a local rink for the kids to play minor hockey. For many visitors, the installations trigger memories of childhood experiences in which friendships, sportsmanship, dreams and disappointments abound.

In the new Hockey Hall of Fame the many realities of hockey are not simply experienced through significant historical objects, touchscreen information kiosks and engaging environments, but also through active participation in the fundamentals of hockey itself. Two extraordinary exhibits exemplify this aspect. The first is an exhibit in which the visitor stands in front of a goalie net, with pads and hockey stick in hand, as professional hockey players shoot pucks at him or her. But the pucks that fly do not endanger the would-be goalie because this exhibit is an experience of 'virtual' reality. Despite the absence of a physical puck, visitors do engage in a whole body response to being a goalie. In the second exhibit, visitors can test their skill by stepping onto a simulated 'ice' surface and shooting pucks at targets. The pucks and sticks in this exhibit are the real thing, and the body experience engendered here is a great complement to the more cerebral nature of other installations.

A highlight of any visit is a stop at the television network exhibit. Here, banks of monitors, miles of cable and an animate (robotic) producer introduce visitors to the behind-the-scenes of a televised hockey broadcast. Visitors who are brave enough can test their skill as a television announcer. A high-tech broadcast booth offers people a chance to watch one of several great moments of professional hockey, complete with the professional commentary carried at the time. Once they have seen the play and heard the commentary, the action is replayed, but this time with printed prompts as to which player has the puck at any given second and *without* the commentary. Thus, the visitor is left to speak, scream or mutter the action and excitement of the play into a microphone, which is played back for the user to hear. It is great fun and yet another example of a non-traditional interpretive strategy in an exhibition.



After having been involved with the many and varied exhibits described above, visitors often find their way to the Bell Great Hall, which is where one finds the coveted awards, trophies and tributes to those 'greats' of hockey who have been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. It is also the sanctuary where one can see, and even touch, the Stanley Cup – hockey's most famous trophy. A palpable feeling of respect and awe is generated both by the presence of the icons of hockey and by the stunning 1880s rococo architecture of the Bank of Montreal building. It seems mysterious that such a place could evoke such powerful feelings – but it does.

Having referred to many qualities of this new facility, it must be said that nothing is ever perfect. From this writer's perspective, the most glaring shortcoming of the new Hockey Hall of Fame, other than the largely unreadable texts that are printed on the glass of many display cases, is the absence of a focus on the shadowy side of hockey. Specifically, very little mention is made of the fine line that separates the conscious striving for excellence and the breakdown into uncontrolled violence – those aspects of the game which demonstrate that the flip side of noble endeavour is destructiveness. This is a serious omission, but one which hopefully will be rectified in the future.

The cultural life of Toronto has been enhanced by the new Hockey Hall of Fame. It is a place that celebrates people and how they live – it pays tribute to a very real part of our culture. Some may suggest that this is a lower form of culture than the arts; however, I would disagree. The Hockey Hall of Fame honours human experience – and that experience includes both archetypal, transpersonal aspects, as well as personal, grounded aspects. In this facility, there is a profound respect for all the individuals who have created the contemporary phenomenon of professional hockey – the stars, the organizers and everyone else who has ever experienced any aspect of the sport. At no point is there any suggestion that hockey relies on the Hall of Fame for its existence. Rather, hockey is simply celebrated here. I believe that museums everywhere need to learn this lesson – that cultural identity exists in people and how they live, not in treasured objects that are kept removed from everyday life. At their best, museums are places where there is a deep honouring of who people are – past, present and future. The Hockey Hall of Fame is one of these places.

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*Edited by Susan Pearce*



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