

Blind Faith and a Pig in a Poke: How the Ottawa Civics Briefly Ruled Canada's Capital

The hockey-starved citizens of Ottawa were ready and willing... but unable to support their second World Hockey Association franchise

by Steve Currier

During the World Hockey Association's rocky seven-year jaunt into the realm of big-time professional sports, many franchises came and went; most of them were bloodsuckers rather than cash cows. Remember the Michigan Stags? How about the Jersey Knights? Or the Minnesota Fighting Saints (both versions of them)? Although none of the aforementioned clubs would ever rival the Montreal Canadiens or even the Columbus Blue Jackets as model franchises, they were world-beaters compared to the subject of this paper, the Ottawa Civics. The Civics weren't particularly bad, and fans were so enthused about their new team that they lined up around the block for tickets and even snarled up downtown traffic. So what happened for the Civics to last just two weeks in Canada's capital?

The Civics started their life as the Denver Spurs, a Western Hockey League expansion franchise that sputtered its way through six (mostly) terrible seasons. The one exception was 1971/72, when the Spurs finished first overall in the WHL standings, and won the league's Lester Patrick Cup. By 1974, the WHL had folded, and the Spurs were on their way to the Central Hockey League, where they would finish the year 36-29-13. While that was all well and good, the people of Denver craved NHL hockey, and for a while, it seemed as though the struggling California Golden Seals would move to the Mile High City. The city of Denver was so sure the NHL was eventually going to find its way to Colorado that it built the 16,061-seat McNichols Arena before even securing a franchise. In the end, fans felt quite disillusioned when they finally got their major-league team, and it wasn't the Seals; rather, it was an expansion franchise in the far-less-glamorous WHA.

Trouble in Denver

Although the Spurs acquired the contracts of several decent players, including Ralph Backstrom, Gary McGregor, and Darryl Maggs, from the recently-defunct Chicago Cougars, the Spurs averaged only 3,500 fans per game (a thousand of those were freebies) during the 1975/76 season. Despite ticket giveaways, "Bring Your Own Buddy Night" (every fan could bring a friend free of charge), and a "Guaranteed Win Night" (the Spurs lost to Calgary, 6-2, so the Denver press dubbed the event "Guaranteed Futility"), no one really cared, so owner Ivan Mullenix, a 38-year-old St. Louis real estate developer, started looking to move the Spurs. In late December, the Spurs were told they owed the city of Denver \$47,334 in

unpaid taxes. The city also wanted him to pay \$66,500 for the remaining nineteen home games on the schedule. Mullenix also owed \$2,300 to off-duty police officers who worked security at games. It was also reported he had a \$2 million bank loan, but Mullenix reminded everyone that he had personally guaranteed it. Mullenix planned on selling shares in the club, but he managed to sell just 30 of 100 units and all of them were in St. Louis. (1)

In the meantime, an Ottawa organization called the Founders Club, led by Ron Sparling, drummer for Canadian country band Family Brown, and women's clothing merchant Henry Feller, was trying to convince the WHA to put a team in Ottawa. This would be no easy feat, since Ottawa hockey fans had earned the reputation as being fickle, an adjective that is still used today from time to time when Nashville or Columbus visit the Canadian Tire Centre and they are greeted by a thousand empty seats. Ottawa was not perceived as an ideal location for a WHA team. After all, the Nationals had been moved to Toronto for its "home" playoff games in their one and only WHA season, 1972-73, because attendance was so poor at the Civic Centre. Attendance for the junior 67's was nothing to brag about either. The 67's owner, Howard Darwin, called Ottawa's fan support "erratic". (2) When the Spurs announced their intention to come to Ottawa for a two-game trial run, mayor Lorry Greenberg refused to contribute even one dollar of the city's money for the franchise.

The Founders Club hoped to convince enough local investors to purchase the club from Mullenix, but the Spurs' \$1.5 million price tag was indeed hefty. In his January 5 opinion column, the *Ottawa Journal's* Eddie MacCabe expressed his doubts concerning the Spurs' plans. Here is the piece in its entirety:

We've had a number of inquiries about the Denver Spurs coming to Ottawa, and whether they can make it, and what kind of a 'reading' they expect after two games here.

It has all happened so fast, nobody has all the answers. But, it would seem that this business of taking a 'reading' after two games is at least a bit of a bluff.

If, for example, the reading is poor, do you really believe they can pack up their shin pads and go back to Denver? And if they do such a foolish thing, would you not suspect the fans would have an idea that it's a temporary thing at best, and ignore them in greater numbers than ever?

Having left Denver, we would think they almost have to finish the season in Ottawa, or some place other than Denver. More, there is more than a hint that they have no interest in going back. According to word from out there, they made the announcement of their leaving while they were on the road.

It's entirely possible that the timing of the announcement was coincident with the opportunity to move, but it has been pointed out that quitting Denver while the club was on the road precluded anyone seizing equipment of whatever, for money owed. It has also been reported, in loose terms, that the Spurs have a \$2 million loan at the bank, that they owe \$70,000 in taxes, \$4,000 in rink rental and about \$1,500 in office renovation costs. (3)

World Hockey Revival

The Spurs were renamed the Ottawa Civics, but the name change did nothing to change the team's fortunes. The Civics lost their first game, 2-1, to the Cincinnati Stingers on January 2. Immediately after the Civics' first game, doubts arose that their best player would even make the move to Ottawa. Captain Ralph Backstrom had an escape clause in his contract, which he believed could be triggered if the franchise relocated. Since there was little guarantee the Civics would last the entire season in Ottawa, Backstrom was reluctant to pack up his belongings and head north. "As of right now, I am a free agent," Backstrom said. "I really don't know what I will do but I will do nothing until I talk to my wife." (4) The Civics disagreed with Backstrom's views. "We haven't seen a copy of his contract so we don't know if his interpretation of it is [correct]," said lawyer Dave Gavsie, the Founders Club's legal adviser. "We have been in touch with Bill Putnam of the WHA office and Putnam told us Backstrom has a legal contract and if he doesn't play Wednesday he can be suspended. He's been paid and he's under contractual obligation to play." (5) Gavsie accused Backstrom's agent, Jeff Rosen, of trying to use the relocation as an opportunity to renegotiate the contract. Reports later swirled that the Indianapolis Racers were looking at signing Backstrom, but nothing ever materialized, and in the end, he joined the rest of the team in Ottawa.

So why did Backstrom even suit up for the Cincinnati game, if he refused to move to Ottawa? That would be because he, and for that matter, all of his teammates, had no idea they had even become the Ottawa Civics. They only realized something was afoot when they started hearing the Canadian national anthem before the contest. That, and the fact their jerseys were now bereft of the Denver Spurs logo that had adorned them since Day One. After all, a giant cowboy-boot logo would seem a smidge silly for a team hailing from a Canadian city crawling with civil servants and stuffy politicians.

Mid-season franchise relocations are certainly rare, and for good reason. For one thing, the time constraint of moving a franchise makes it nearly impossible to print assigned-seat tickets. Faced with little choice the team opted to divide the Ottawa Civic Centre, which could accommodate a standing-room crowd of 9,000, into three general admission sections. Ticket prices were set at \$4 for half the seats in the arena, another 3,700 would cost \$6, and the last 1,500 seats would go for \$8. Students, children and senior citizens were given the opportunity to purchase the cheapest tickets at half price. The Civics would make their home

debut January 7 versus the New England Whalers. (6) “There are still a great many things to do,” explained Sparling, “and we hope people will bear with us until we can get things a little more organized. There just isn’t enough time to get everything ready between now and Wednesday.” (7) Ivan Mullenix, for one, hoped to jettison his money pit as soon as possible. “It is not my intention to run a hockey club in Ottawa,” he admitted. “I am hoping the club can be sold to a person or a group of persons in Ottawa.” He also said the Civics would finish out the season in Canada’s capital city. (8)

Games Two and Three

The Civics took their traveling road show to Houston, but their output was hardly better than Game One; they dropped a 4-2 decision to the defending Avco Cup champions. Andre Hinse opened the scoring at 11:35 of the first period and Gordie Howe increased the lead to 2-0 with a goal at 17:36. Hinse made it 3-0 with his second goal of the night at 2:58 of the second, and Larry Lund scored at 16:32 to make it 4-0. MacGregor and Mark Lumenda scored for Ottawa in the third period, but the team’s fate that night had already been sealed.

The Civics then headed north to St. Paul where the Minnesota Fighting Saints awaited. Thirty-three-year-old rookie goaltender Lynn Zimmerman, himself on a five-game tryout with the Civics, looked solid, making 33 saves, including 21 in the second period, en route to a 5-2 win. The game was a lot closer than it seemed. The Civics stormed out to a 2-0 lead on goals by MacGregor and Rick Morris, but the Saints’ Mike Walton scored on a breakaway at 9:48 of the first period. Don Borgeson restored the Civics’ two-goal lead after taking a long pass from Backstrom and then rifling a 35-foot shot past the Minnesota goaltender. John McKenzie reduced the lead to one goal during a third-period power play after deflecting a shot past Zimmerman, but Borgeson teamed up with Backstrom on another goal at 16:35 to put the game out of reach. Brian Lavender scored an empty-net goal with ten seconds left to cap off an impressive Ottawa win.

Civic Interest

The Civics flew to Ottawa for what was to be their second home-opener of the season, against the New England Whalers. Doubters were in for quite a surprise when a full house appeared before their eyes. January 1976 would be a very exciting period for Ottawa fans craving their very own professional hockey team. This was no longer the WHA of three years earlier. The league had greatly reduced the talent gap with the NHL, and Ottawa was now excited to be a part of the WHA:

When the first game was played in the World Hockey Association back in October of 1972
Ottawa hockey fans greeted the arrival of the league with a yawn.

There was nothing in that first hockey game either to wake any of the handful in the rink.

But the return of the WHA to Ottawa last night was a different story. Traffic was backing up on the Driveway 30 minutes before game time. The game had to be delayed 20 minutes to give fans a chance to get into the rink and by the time they were ready to go there were 8,457 in the building.

And they never stopped hollering. (9)

The Civics left quite the impression on their new fans. The Whalers jumped out to a 2-0 lead on a first-period goal by Tom Webster, who was left unattended in front of Zimmerman, and another by Rosaire Paiement. As time wound down, Rick Morris skated down the right wing and feathered a pass over to line-mate Lavender, who then shot the puck past goaltender Christer Abrahamsson. The late-period goal gave the Civics some jump.

The Civics dominated the rest of the way, outshooting the Whalers 27-12 the final forty minutes, but the scoreboard told a different story. Lavender scored once again at 11:44 of the second to knot the game at two, on assists from Frank Rochon and Zimmerman. The score remained 2-2 until 17:34 of the third when Tom Webster scored his 24th of the season. Ottawa pulled Zimmerman in the final minute of the game, hoping for the tie, but the Whalers hung on for the 3-2 win.

“We outplayed them,” lamented Civics head coach Jean-Guy Talbot. “It makes me mad. We’ve lost 10 like that this year. We had enough chances. They didn’t get many chances but they scored.” (10) The players, however, felt a renewed enthusiasm envelop them as their new fans welcomed them to Canada’s capital. “It gave us a lift,” Talbot said. “The guys were excited between periods. Everybody’s been upset about the move. We had three road games and then off skates for two days travelling. I asked them to just forget about all that and go out and hustle. They did.” (11)

If anyone doubted the WHA could succeed in Ottawa, they were proven wrong, if opening night was any indication. Eddie MacCabe waxed ecstatic about the transplanted Spurs:

Who would have expected a hurry-up, first night promotion to attract about 8,500 fans into the rink? Not I sir, and not any of the Founders Club.

But there they were, whooping and roaring and blowing horns and having a rare old time and the Ottawa Civics, nee Denver Spurs, rewarded them with a good hustling hockey game, but alas, another one goal loss...

They can skate. They're busy and energetic and they check. They create scoring opportunities in exciting clusters, but they have trouble putting it in the net. If they can develop a couple of triggermen, they'll be a handful for anybody. (12)

That was Fun, but Where's the Money?

Although the Civics' home opener had been a rousing success, the Spurs' permanent relocation to Ottawa was anything but guaranteed. Two days after the 3-2 loss to New England, the team held a press conference to set the record straight about what its intentions were. The team tried to convince anyone who would listen that Ottawa needed a pro hockey team, and that bringing one to town was simply a question of everyone banding together to buy it. It was just *that* easy! The Founders Club announced it was looking to incorporate a non-profit community owned corporation. The hope was to sell two types of memberships, some for \$25 and others for \$1,000. According to the *Ottawa Journal's* Gerald Redmond, however, "that is fine and positive but how the Founders expect to attract investors on blind faith is something else." (13) In fact, no one really knew what exactly the Founders were investing in, and no sale price was even formally announced. Mullenix desperately wanted to get rid of the team, but how much he was willing to accept, no one really knew. The whole deal was a big convoluted mess. "After three days of intensive discussions, the Founders Club has made a tentative proposal to owner Ivan Mullenix, to buy the Ottawa Civics. This tentative proposal does not constitute a binding obligation by either side and negotiations to this end are still continuing. Mr. Mullenix has returned to St. Louis where the proposal submitted by the Founders' Club is under consideration by both he and the financial institution with which he deals. Until the proposal has been finalized, further details of the proposal cannot be made known at this time." (14) The problem was the Founders didn't actually have much, if any, money of their own, but they sincerely hoped they would find investors in Ottawa willing to take a gamble on a last-place team. Rumours said the purchase price was about \$1.5 million, but Sparling told everyone to "Forget about the figures you've heard." (15)

What was a cold hard fact, however, was that the clock was ticking. Mullenix admitted he would not pay players anymore after he met the January 15 payroll, and that if no one stepped forward to take the club off his hands, he was going to fold it. The Founders simply shrugged the threat, believing the WHA would be foolish to let such a promising market slip away after such a successful opening night. The Founders campaigned to sell season tickets for the remaining home games on the 1975-76 schedule: "Monies from the sale of season tickets are deposited with the Royal Trust Company in Ottawa to be

released on a per game basis until the Ottawa Civics have been purchased by the new corporation,” explained Redmond. (16) There were also plans to raise money through loans and other contributions with the intention of making the Civics a community-owned franchise. If the sale failed to happen, the money would be returned to contributors after organizational expenses were paid. The bottom line, however, was that there was little concrete evidence the sale was ever going to happen. Redmond explained, “that’s still asking contributors to buy a pig in a poke. The legal niceties we can understand if an individual is buying a club from another individual. We can understand salaries being confidential but not confidential to the owners. If the people of Ottawa are to be the owners then they should be told what they are buying, for how much and what it will cost to keep it going.” (17)

Games Five and Six

The Civics headed back out on the road after their brief one-game home stand, and their opponents greeted them with heavy artillery. In Phoenix, the Roadrunners’ top line scored six times, including a hat-trick by Robbie Ftorek. His left wing, Del Hall, scored two more, while recently promoted Lauri Mononen scored a goal and three assists. Ron Huston and Jim Boyd also scored for Phoenix en route to an 8-5 triumph. Poor Lynn Zimmerman was pelted with 40 shots in the loss. Backstrom continued his strong season with a two-goal performance, while Barry Legge, Darryl Maggs and Jim Sherrit each scored singles for Ottawa.

The Civics’ porous defence was hardly better the following night in Winnipeg as the Jets blitzed Zimmerman with 49 shots. The goalie’s teammates definitely owed him a few post-game beers for keeping the Civics in the game. The score remained close as the teams went to the dressing room tied 2-2 after the first and 3-3 after the second, but the Civics broke the game open in the third on goals by MacGregor at 2:12 and at 6:37. For the second goal, MacGregor stole the puck from Thommie Bergman ten feet in front of goalie Joe Daley and beat him on a high shot. The Jets woke up a few minutes later as Norm Beaudin scored on a partial breakaway at 11:54. The Jets continued to pressure Zimmerman for the next few minutes until Bobby Hull tied the game 5-5 with 5:32 to play. The Jets outshot Ottawa 7-2 in the overtime period, but Zimmerman stood tall, stopping both Anders Hedberg and Bobby Hull in the first thirty seconds. Peter Sullivan tried to beat him with a shot ten feet out, but he was denied. Ted Green had a great opportunity on the rebound, but Zimmerman snagged the puck out of the air. Then Mike Ford hummed a blistering slap shot at the net, which Zimmerman kicked aside, but the puck landed near Bobby Hull. Zimmerman stopped him too. The Civics were just 1:59 away from gaining a point in the standings when Hedberg scored on a wrist shot in front of Zimmerman. The club would return home to Ottawa 1-5-0 since the move north.

The Return Home and a Final Goodbye

The Founders Club stated publicly that they were prepared to pay Mullenix “a certain amount of money,” but they would not elaborate much more than that. They also admitted that if an Ottawa group bought the Civics, the team would find itself in the red, but that did not deter Feller. “We would be looking at a loss, but once we get a non-profit organization set up, certain things would change. There would be differences in tax structure for one thing, and looking ahead, expenses in future would be lower.” (18) Mullenix told league trustees he expected the Civics to finish out the season in Ottawa with the help of local investors.

It was far from certain the Civics would be staying in Canada’s capital, but fans were jazzed to see their team take on Gordie Howe and the Houston Aeros. The kind of enthusiasm for this meaningless regular-season game certainly indicated Ottawa was planning a glorious future for its second WHA team. Eddie MacCabe described the scene outside the Civic Centre:

Such is the flame of first love that the fans even enjoyed lining up, it appeared. One lady had a child-in-arms, and when she tired, her neighbor volunteered to help. After dandling the baby for a while, he passed it on, and pretty soon the baby was 15 fans up the line and having a great time.

Another father with two little boys was having an aggravating time of it. The kids climbed over the seats, ran and fell, cried, whined and complained. The father cajoled, scolded and threatened and finally said to a kid, about 10:

‘Look... you wanna see Gordie Howe?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well then, shaddup and stay still.’

Instant reform. (19)

MacCabe believed the Civics’ only logical option was to remain in Ottawa: “the early signs have been so good,” he wrote, “that neither the league nor Mullinex (sic) can turn their backs at this point. It appears he has three routes to travel: 1) sell to the Ottawa group; 2) run the club himself in Ottawa, or 3) Fold. So, No. 3 doesn’t make sense, and the other two put the club in Ottawa.” (20) Done deal, right? Wrong.

While fans were scooping up every last ticket they could for the Houston game, Mullenix was in negotiations with the Founders Club, but their crucial meeting did not go well. Feller refused to comment on their discussions and Mullenix “gave a terse ‘no comment’” (21) to reporters when discussions ended at 4:05 a.m. Nevertheless, the following day, January 14, the *Journal* announced that a deal was all but sealed: the Founders were going to pay \$1 million – far less than the \$1.5 million previously announced -- for control of the Civics, with \$400,000 going to Mullenix, and the other \$600,000 to the league. The players, who had been living in a hotel, and had been separated from their families for weeks, would finally be able to settle down and plant some roots. “I love it here,” said left wing Rick Morris. “I sincerely feel we’ve found a home. It’s so different here after Chicago and Denver. People recognize you, and say hello.

“The other day we were at practice and there must have been a thousand people lined up to buy tickets. It’s really something... gives us a whole new feeling.” (22)

What could have possibly gone wrong when Ottawa seemed like a perfect location for the team? All Mullenix wanted was to wipe his hands of the Civics and get back the money he had already sunk into the team, about \$1.4 million, with \$700,000 still owing to the league. The Founders believed Mullenix would accept \$400,000, and the WHA even agreed to cut down his debt to \$600,000 for an even \$1 million. According to Feller, Mullenix rejected the Founders’ million-dollar offer because he wanted a \$125,000 down payment to pay off, as he called them, “immediate obligations,” (23) but the Founders could not fork over the dough, so Mullenix took his pucks and sticks, and went home. The Founders offered to make a first payment of \$150,000 in April, but Mullenix needed the money right away. It may have been a moot point anyway, as the WHA steadfastly refused to let any team change hands for less than \$1.5 million, the established price tag on an expansion franchise. Selling a team for less than that would have made the league look pretty bad. The Founders learned that day that good intentions can’t overcome the power of money. The *Journal*’s Eddie MacCabe, while disappointed the Civics would not remain in Ottawa, did not blame Mullenix for the deal falling through: “it’s easy to look at the whole thing through our end of the pipe and brand him Ivan the Terrible, but... if you go shopping for an expensive item, you can expect to put serious money down. We couldn’t.” (24) The WHA was not going to step in to save the club either, as the league decided it could no longer prop up ailing franchises. The Minnesota Fighting Saints would also bite the dust a month later.

A sell-out crowd of 9,355 greeted the Civics as they took to the ice. Fans had already heard the news that the Founders Club had failed to come to an agreement with Mullenix, but the Civics voted to play the Aeros anyway. WHA executive vice-president Bud Poile assured the players their contracts would be fully honoured in the event they were injured. The teams looked sluggish early on, but the pace improved in the second half of the game. As the third period wound down, eight goals had been scored, four by each team. The Civics and Aeros would go to overtime despite the fact Houston had outshot their hosts 55-25.

Goaltender Cam Newton deserved a medal for his efforts. The Civics looked fatigued, and obviously unfocussed. They knew their two-week ordeal of travelling from one city to another without knowing where to hang their hat, was about to come to an end. Gord Labossiere scored his second goal of the night just 1:37 into overtime to give Houston a 5-4 win.

Gone at the Stroke of Midnight

Just days earlier, all signs pointed to the Civics staying in Ottawa for a very long time. Then POOF! ... one overtime goal, and the Civics disappeared as quickly as they came. If the Founders Club had been given more time, could they have raised the missing money to buy the club? On January 15, the Club had collected \$55,000 in pledges, and the figure, according to the *Ottawa Journal*, was still rising. "I'm positive we could have collected a half-million dollars from people, if given more time" said John Denofrio, a Founders member. (25) Mullenix, however, was in no position to negotiate for more time; in Denver, his creditors seized \$15,000 in office furniture and another \$8,000 worth of goods in his apartment to pay for the \$55,737 the team owed in back taxes. He also owed rent at McNichols Arena and had a \$2 million bank loan. Some 1,500 season-ticket holders were also looking for refunds for unplayed games.

Immediately after the game, it was announced Ralph Backstrom and Don Borgeson had been sold to the New England Whalers, and Gary MacGregor and Barry Legge would be moving to Cleveland. The Indianapolis Racers, struggling with a 16-24-2 record, bought the contracts of Darryl Maggs, Bryon Baltimore, François Rochon, and Mark Lomenda, and the move paid immediate dividends as the Racers went on a 19-15-4 run that propelled them into the playoffs for the first time. Everyone else on the Civics roster, including coach Jean-Guy Talbot, became a free agent at the stroke of midnight. The deals were made in such quick succession that it was believed Mullenix had started shopping players around at the all-star break in the event he couldn't reach an agreement with the Founders Club. (26) The franchise was officially dissolved on January 17, 1976, but there was still one last bit of business to sort out. On January 28, the Civics' equipment as well as furniture seized from the team and from Mullenix's apartment, was auctioned off for \$42,000.

You may be asking which players stood out most for the Civics. During the Civics' seven-game WHA tenure, Gary MacGregor led the club with four goals, while Ralph Backstrom and Mark Lomenda led everyone with six assists. Backstrom and MacGregor jointly hold the Civics' all-time scoring record with nine points. Below is the Civics' all-time scoring and penalty minutes list. Please note that since only scoring summaries were available, it is unknown how many games each player played; therefore, only players who recorded a point or a penalty are listed.

	Goals	Assists	Points	Penalty minutes
Ralph Backstrom	3	6	9	6
Gary MacGregor	4	5	9	4
Mark Lomenda	2	6	8	0
Frank Rochon	2	5	7	4
Don Borgeson	3	3	6	6
Darryl Maggs	2	3	5	6
Jim Sherrit	2	2	4	4
Brian Lavender	3	1	4	6
Bryon Baltimore	1	2	3	0
Peter Mara	0	2	2	0
Rick Morris	1	1	2	4
Lynn Zimmerman	0	1	1	0
Larry Bignell	0	1	1	0
Barry Legge	1	0	1	9
Ron Delorme	0	0	0	10
John Arbour	0	0	0	2
Cam Newton	0	0	0	0

Goaltending stats:

Lynn Zimmerman:

GP	MINS	SHOTS	GA	SAVES	SAVE %	GAA
6	368:01	252	25	227	.901	4.08

Cam Newton:

GP	MINS	SHOTS	GA	SAVES	SAVE %	GAA
1	61:37	55	5	50	.909	4.92

Total	429:38	307	30	277	.902	4.19
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While fans in Ottawa proved they were more than ready to support another professional hockey franchise, they had been unknowingly sitting behind the eight-ball from the very beginning. Other than finding some quick cash in the span of two weeks, there was simply nothing more they could have done to make the Civics stay. Ivan Mullenix had dug himself into a financial hole the size of the Grand Canyon,

and only money, not a community's good intentions, were going to make that situation any rosier. The sad saga of the Ottawa Civics spoke volumes about the precarious state of the WHA that they refused to temporarily prop up a team that was selling out games. The league had had too many bad experiences in Denver and Chicago, among other places, all of whom saw their teams go belly up due to low attendance, but Ottawa was not Denver or Chicago. Ottawa should have been given a chance to prove it could be a viable market, but they didn't even get another sniff until the Ottawa Senators made their grand re-entrance into the NHL in 1992.

Steve Currier is a native of Cornwall, Ontario currently living in Ottawa, and he has been a devoted fan of the Montreal Canadiens since 1987. He has written a book on the history of the California Golden Seals, which will be published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2017. He also runs the Seals tribute site, GoldenSealsHockey.com, and has been a member of the Seals Booster Club since 2012.

(1) Redmond, Gerald. "Mullenix wants to sell immediately," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 6, 1976.

(2) "Musical teams," *Brandon Sun*, Jan. 3, 1976.

(3) MacCabe, Eddie. "Hockey lessons to be learned," Jan. 5, 1976.

(4) "Backstrom now doubtful," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 3, 1976.

(5) "Backstrom case a top priority," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 5, 1976.

(6) *Ibid.*

(7) "Problems galore but Civics set," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 3, 1976.

(8) Redmond, Gerald. "Mullenix wants to sell Civics immediately,"

(9) Redmond, Gerald. "Everything great but the score," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 8, 1976.

(10) *Ibid.*

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) MacCabe, Eddie. "Welcome signs never brighter," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 8, 1976.

(13) Redmond, Gerald. "More optimism than hard facts," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 10, 1976.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) *Ibid.*

(18) "Mullenix asking more \$ now," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 13, 1976.

(19) MacCabe, Eddie. "A Strange Romance," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 14, 1976.

(20) *Ibid.*

(21) "Civics assured of sellout," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 14, 1976.

(22) MacCabe, Eddie. "Civics' deal all teed up?" *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 15, 1976.

(23) MacCabe, Eddie. "Readers write only of hockey," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 20, 1976.

(24) *Ibid.*

(25) Kealey, Clem. "Ottawa loses game, WHA franchise," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 16, 1976.

(26) "Sorting out the mess," *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 17, 1976.