

“To tend goal for the greatest junior team ever” – Ted Tucker, former California Golden Seals and Montreal Junior Canadiens goalie

by Nathaniel Oliver - published on [August 30, 2016](#)

Three of them won the Stanley Cup. One is in the Hockey Hall of Fame. Arguably three more should be. Six were NHL All-Star selections. Each one of them played professional hockey, whether it was in the NHL, WHA, or in the minors – they all made it to the pro level. And I am fortunate enough to have one of the two goaltenders for the 1968-69 Montreal Junior Canadiens – the team still widely considered the greatest junior hockey team of all time – to be sharing his story with me.

Edward (Ted) William Tucker was born May 7th, 1949 in Fort William, Ontario. From his earliest moments of playing street hockey or shinny, Ted Tucker wanted to be a goaltender. Beginning to play organized hockey at the age of nine, there was minimal opportunity to start the game at a younger age. “At the time that I started playing hockey, there were no Tom Thumb, Mites, or Squirts programs in my hometown. There was a small ad in our local newspaper from the *Elks* organization, looking for players and asking which position you preferred to play. I asked my parents if I could sign up, and right from the get-go I wanted to be a goalie”.

As a youngster, Tucker’s play between the pipes would take some time to develop, though improvement took place each year as he played. “In my first year of hockey, I was a pretty bad goalie because in 12-games I let in around 120-goals and finished in last place out of 12-teams. But in my second year we placed sixth out of the twelve, and in my final year we came in second, won the championship in the playoffs, and I won my first goaltending trophy”.

Here is where Ted’s story takes an interesting turn. Prior to the expansion of 1967, National Hockey League teams used what were called “C”-forms as a means of securing prospects for the future of their organizations. There were also “A”-forms, which committed a player to a tryout with the club, and “B”-forms which gave the team the option of signing a player in return for a bonus. But the “C”-forms were the most binding of the three forms, as they committed the professional rights of the player to that particular hockey team. “C”-forms could only be signed by the player at the age of eighteen, or by the player’s parents, often in exchange for some type of signing bonus. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Montreal Canadiens were almost notoriously known for securing talent for their club’s future by nearly any means necessary. “After I finished Pee Wee hockey, all of the graduating players would have a choice as to what teams they wanted to try out for and play on. My dad, who did not know it at the time, offered my services to the Fort William Canadiens, who sponsored two teams in the Bantam and the Midget divisions. So I ended up signing with Fort William, a branch of the Montreal Canadiens, in exchange for a pair of goalie skates; not knowing at the time that by doing so I also became their property for life as a minor league player”. Just like that, Ted Tucker was owned by the Montreal Canadiens. The irony being, that although Tucker was now property of Montreal, his favorite hockey club as a kid was the Detroit Red Wings, particularly their superstars “Mr. Hockey” Gordie Howe and arguably the greatest goaltender of all time, Terry Sawchuk.



Ted Tucker tended net for the 1968-69 Montreal Jr. Canadiens; the team believed to be the greatest junior hockey team ever assembled. *(Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker).*

While with Fort William, Tucker's success would continue to build each year, winning the division and the championship his second year at the Bantam level, and then also repeating the feat with the Canadiens at the Midget level as well. Tucker won goaltender trophies in his last year with each division. His success level was strong enough to vault Tucker into four more years of Junior-A hockey with Fort William, as opposed to playing out his time in the juvenile divisions. Sharing the goaltending duties initially with the Canadiens Junior-A squad before solidifying himself as the number one through his solid play, Tucker would once more win the division for Fort William, another goaltending trophy of his own, and another championship as well.

Montreal's Canadiens must have taken note of Tucker's play in Fort William, and invited him to their Peterborough training camp the following year, and then sent him to their Junior Canadiens camp that same time. Tucker was faced with some decision making, as to where he wanted to play and how he would handle his schooling. "I practiced there (Junior Canadiens' camp) for about a week and a half, and they offered me a chance to play in the Montreal Junior Metro League. I turned that down and said that I wanted to go back home and finish my grade-12, and also play more with Fort William since I was now their starter; to me, this was the right decision to make". Though Tucker's choice to return to the Fort William team did not secure a championship that year, it did provide him with an opportunity to have his first run at a major title. "I was picked up by the Port Arthur MARRS (named after the trucking company and their sponsor, *W.H. Marr, Ltd.*), and we played and lost to the Toronto Marlies 4-1 in the Memorial Cup Championship". It would be the MARRS only shot at a Memorial Cup title.

Following the 1967 season, Ted would have more decisions to make as he deciphered which path he wanted his hockey career to go down; that of continuing to play Major Junior hockey, or go the route of university; both seemingly lucrative options for an eighteen year old. “I had two offers come in after that season. One was a full ride to the University of Minnesota Duluth, and the other was with the Montreal Junior Canadiens. I turned down the scholarship for two reasons. One was that I would only play about 15-games my first year, and two, I really didn’t know what I wanted to be after I left college. On the other hand, Montreal said they would pay for my education, and I would also be playing in the best junior hockey league in all of Canada, the Ontario Hockey Association (OHA)”. The decision made by Tucker was well-reasoned, but having to balance both school and hockey would prove exceptionally difficult, and soon he would have to pick one or the other instead of tackling both. “Unfortunately, with all the travel that we did, I got into an absenteeism problem at school. I was told by the school that I either had to stop playing hockey, or I would not be able to write any of my exams, even though I had passing grades in every class. I knew that Montreal wouldn’t pay for my schooling if I just went to school, so I ended up quitting school”.

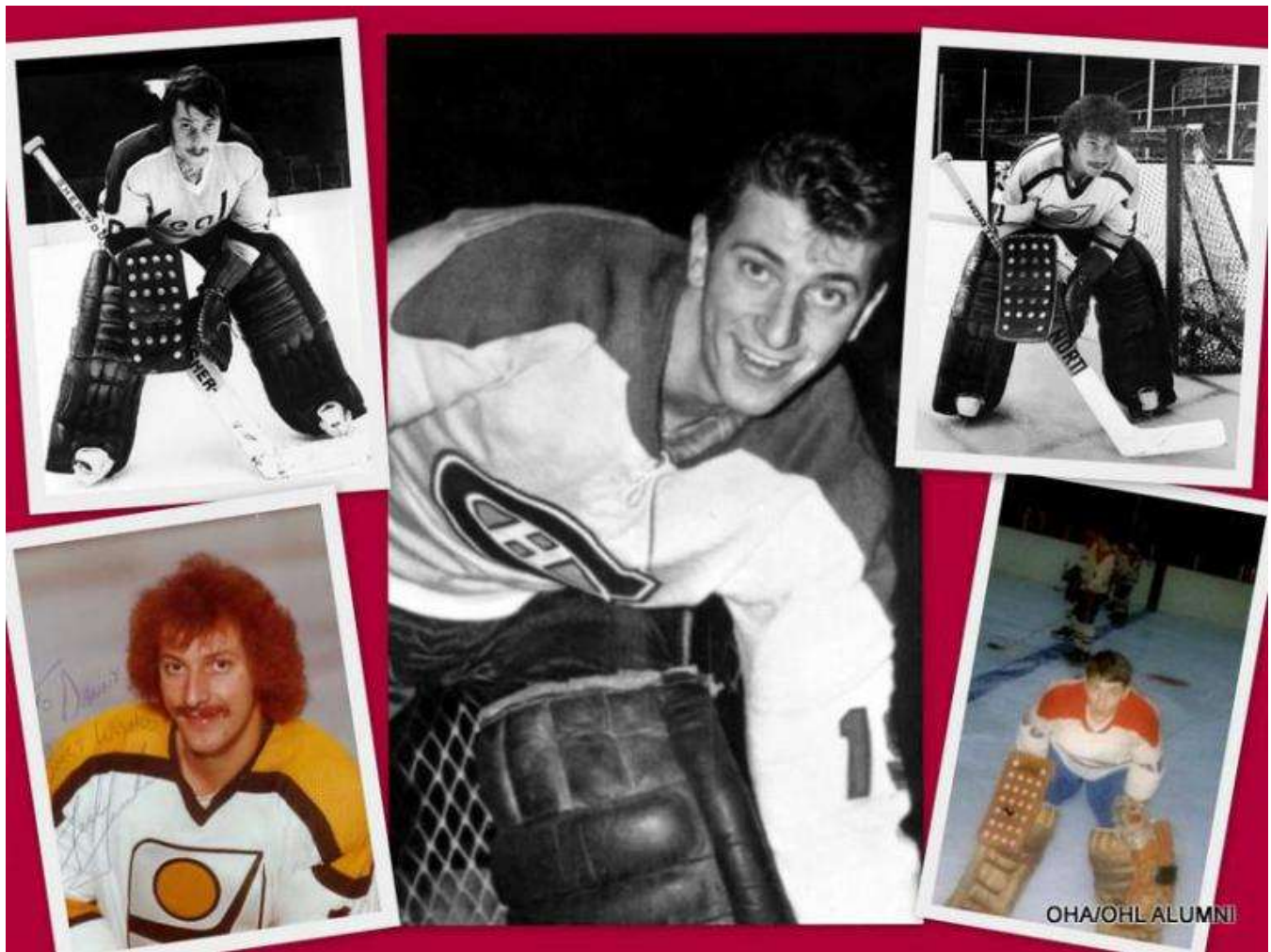


Ted Tucker pictured here during his time with the IHL’s Toledo Goaldiggers – some of his best hockey memories came during his years with this particular team. *(Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker).*

I suppose that an outsider could argue either way about Ted Tucker's decision to forgo school and focus on hockey instead. Tucker's electing to play for the Montreal Junior Canadiens would be an opportunity of a lifetime that would be even more of a special rarity than what he ever could have surmised at the time. An opportunity that would see him become part of one of the greatest assemblages of hockey players on one team, at one time. Not an All-Star roster. Not an Olympics or Canada Cup team. Rather, a hockey club that was combined for a regular season of play – not a meaningless festivity for fun, or a temporary allegiance for one's country.

“In my first year on the team, there were only four English players, and the rest were French. Our coach, Roger Bedard, was also French. He would say everything in French in practices and in games. If he had anything to say to one of us four, or if we didn't do a play right, then he would talk to us in English. In my second and last year playing Junior, there were only three English players on that team”, Tucker tells me. That final year being 1968-69. Take a moment to contemplate this particular team's roster. They had two-thirds of what would become the Buffalo Sabres' fabled “French Connection” line in both Gilbert Perreault and the late Rick Martin. Even with Perreault and Martin on their roster, The Junior Canadiens leading scorer that season was Rejean Houle, who put up 53-goals and 55-assists for 108-points in a mere 54-games. Once making it to the NHL, Houle would go on to win five Stanley Cup championships with the Montreal Canadiens. Left-winger Marc Tardif would finish his career as the all-time leading goal scorer in the World Hockey Association, though even he would get his name inscribed on Lord Stanley's Cup prior to jumping to the WHA when he won it with Montreal in 1971 and 1973. The ever-colorful Andre “Moose” Dupont patrolled the blueline for the Junior Canadiens that year as well, long before he became one of the “Broad Street Bullies” and won two Stanley Cups with the Philadelphia Flyers. Throw in the likes of Josh Guevremont, Guy Charron, J.P. Bordeleau, Bobby Lalonde, Norm Gratton, Richard Lemieux, and Serge Lajeunesse, all of whom would go onto strong, lengthy NHL careers, and you have a team whose talent level will never be achieved again on one roster in junior hockey.

Tucker affirms this by saying, “This was the highlight of my Junior career, as we went on to win the Memorial Cup that year. The history speaks for itself. If you Google the '68-'69 Montreal Junior Canadiens, they say that this was, and still is, the best junior hockey team ever assembled. Every player on that team went on to play pro hockey”. All in the one year, that Junior Canadiens team captured the Memorial Cup, the J. Ross Robertson Cup as the winner of the OHA's playoff championship, the Hamilton Spectator Cup as the team that finished with the best record in the OHA, and the George T. Richardson Memorial Trophy as the champions of the Eastern Canadian Junior “A”.



Ted Tucker and the many teams he played for throughout his hockey career. (Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker).

Ted Tucker's memories of this team and his teammates are still very vivid to this day. I ask him to share with me some of his fondest memories from that hockey club. "Even though there were only three English speaking players on that team, we never felt anything but appreciation from the French players. They all joked around with us, and it was amazing to see the passion Gilbert Perreault had for wrestling; he would go into these wrestling, clowning-around episodes on the ice and in the locker room. The other thing that they would do was play "keep away" with the puck, and you could see all their talents come out, especially Marc Tardiff's and Gilbert's when they did that in practice".

Believe it or not, the excitement and the passion amongst fans towards the '68-'69 Junior Canadiens rivaled and even sometimes surpassed that of the NHL's Canadiens. As Tucker recalls, "my first year playing in Montreal in the old Forum, the crowds started out small; maybe some nights 5,000 people. But as the season progressed, we would get it up to 8,000 to 10,000 fans. Then in my second season, we were averaging anywhere from 12,000 to 14,000 a game. One night, the NHL club drew 16,000 on a Saturday night, and we had a big rivalry with Oshawa and outdrew the Canadiens as we had over 18,000 attend the game. This was unreal for Junior hockey at the time".

Can one even imagine the concept of a junior club outdoing the greatest hockey franchise of all time, the Montreal Canadiens? It seems unfathomable, though the NHL greats certainly seemed to appreciate what these teenagers were doing for the organization and for the game of hockey. Ted remembers that, “our dressing rooms was just down the hallway from the NHL Canadiens, and to see these players practicing was amazing. Being able to go into that room and see all the players, and every once in a while, some of them would show up at our games to watch us play. Guys like Gump Worsley, Jean Beliveau, and John Ferguson, just to name a few”. Even these Canadiens’ and hockey greats were fans of Tucker and his junior teammates.

The problem with being a goaltender in the Montreal Canadiens’ organization, especially during the 1960s, was that there was a logjam of talented netminders that the club owned, and opportunity for advancement and playing with the parent club was slim to none for a lot of Canadiens’ prospects, including Ted Tucker. Suffice it to say that when his Junior career ended, there was next to no chance that Tucker would find himself on the NHL Canadiens’ roster, or even with one of their top minor league affiliates. “In the Fall of 1969, I attended my first professional training camp with the Montreal Canadiens, and I was one of fifteen goalies to participate in the camp”, Tucker tells me. “I knew the odds of making the AHL or the CHL affiliated teams were pretty well stacked against me. But I practiced very hard, and started making the goalie cuts as they needed a total of eight goalies for their teams (the NHL roster, AHL’s Cleveland Barons, CHL’s Houston Apollos, and IHL’s Muskegon Mohawks). I survived the cuts, and was one of three goalies for the final cuts to be made for Muskegon.

“After a week of working out with Muskegon, I was called into GM Morris “Moose” Lallo’s office. I was given the option of either staying with Muskegon and being the backup to Bruce Mullett, who I just happened to be paired with during my first year with the Montreal Junior Canadiens at a week salary of \$150, or go play with the Clinton Comets in the Eastern Hockey League, who were a farm team of the Minnesota North Stars”. Minnesota did not have enough goalies of their own in order to stock the Clinton team, so that is how the opening presented itself. “Moose told me that I would be the only goalie there in Clinton, and he said he would tell them that I was going to be paid \$180 for playing in Muskegon, which was a lie. To me it was no-brainer as I would get to play every game, and make \$30 more a week, which was a lot back in 1969”.

Deciding to play for Clinton, Ted Tucker was the youngest player on the Comets’ roster, his first year of professional hockey. Despite his young age, Lallo’s word held true and Ted Tucker would suit up for nearly every one of Clinton’s game for his first two years; 69-games played in 1969-70, followed by 74-games in 1970-71. Some of Tucker’s teammates, like Len Speck, were twice his age or close to it. I ask Ted to tell me about those first few years of pro with the Comets. “After arriving in Clinton, I found out that they played in two separate arenas; one was the Clinton Arena where they played the majority of their games, and the other was the Utica Arena, which was about a 20-minute drive from Clinton, and we would usually play there on Friday nights”. The way that the Utica Arena was maintained could be a nightmare for goaltenders, as Tucker quickly become familiarized with. “The interesting part about those games was they wouldn’t put a whitewash down on the ice because they took the ice out after every game to accommodate basketball games and concerts, so that they could save money; they would just paint the standard face-off circles, the goal-lines, blue, and center ice lines. Needless to say, this was very hard to see the puck, as it was basically playing on black ice. So to start every period, I would have my teammates scrape the ice in the same manner that a goalie scrapes his crease, just to try and make a little more texture to the black ice”.



An early rare team photo of Ted Tucker with the Clinton Comets in the front row with his goaltender pads. Tucker would win a championship with the Comets during his first pro season (*Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker*).

The novelty of the black ice and the two separate arenas, the joy of regularly playing close to 70-games a season, and the veteran leadership amongst teammates culminated into early success for Ted Tucker and the Comets, as they would win the EHL Walker Cup championship, after compiling a superb record of 50-16-8 in his first pro season. “I still cherish my three years of playing with the Clinton Comets, as it allowed me to develop at a faster rate. This first year was like a dream come true and a magical season, as I also won the Rookie of the Year Award, I was a First Team All-Star, and I won the trophy as the top goaltender for 1969-70. I will always remember and cherish that playoff run. In the second round of the playoffs we were playing the New Haven Blades. We won the first two games at home, and the first in New Haven. My roommate when we went into New Haven was Ian Anderson, who was one tough SOB; he kept the guys from screening me in front of my net. Ian said to me before the start of Game-3 that if I got a shutout, he would give me a pair of new golf shoes, as he knew that I loved golf and he also owned a sporting goods store in Utica. Wouldn't you know it, I get the shutout that night and we were all bubbly about going up three games to none in the series. Here's where the plot thickens – Dave Hainsworth, who was a terrific goalie for New Haven, gets super hot and proceeds to shut us out three games in a row to force a Game-7 in Clinton. So here we are now in Game-7, and New Haven comes out flying and they score two quick goals and are outplaying us in every aspect of the game. Somehow we weathered the

storm and eventually tied the game up in the third period. Everyone in the building is thinking we are going to go into OT as we were in the last minute of play. All of sudden, we scored with 15-seconds to go in the period. To this day, you can ask any player on that New Haven team, and they'll tell you that the goal shouldn't have counted, as it went in from the side of the net through a hole in the netting. The refs checked and rechecked the netting and found no hole, so the goal was counted. Just before we took the final faceoff, (center) Jack Kane comes up to me and says, 'just stay calm, and you'd better stop anything that gets shot your way'. After that wild affair in the round against New Haven, Ted Tucker and his Comets teammates went on to play Greensboro from the Southern Division for the Walker Cup. Though they would lose the first two games of the series, they would rally to win the next four games in a row, including an all out firestorm in Game-3 which saw an 8-7 overtime victory, after Tucker was pulled for an extra attacker, being the Comets means of tying the game. At the end of it all, Ted Tucker was an EHL champion in his first season of pro hockey.

One last side note on Ted Tucker's three years in Clinton – he would actually play two playoff games for a completely different team during the 1970-71 season by suiting up for the Syracuse Blazers, even though he was still a Comet. "In the EHL, most teams only carried one goalie to save on costs. In the playoffs, you were allowed to pick up a goalie for emergency situations. Well, we had lost in the first-round that year, and Syracuse's goalie hurt his knee. Since Clinton is only 50-miles from Syracuse, they asked me if I would play for them". The Blazers would end up being one of ten professional teams that Tucker would play for during his career.

In the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, the National Hockey League was growing at a rapid pace. The league would expand from six teams to twelve in 1967, followed by adding two more into the fold in 1970 when they added Buffalo and Vancouver. Then, two years later they would add the New York Islanders and the Atlanta Flames. For players like Ted Tucker, who had been on the periphery of the NHL, expansion opened up potential job opportunities that were once much harder to come by prior to 1967. In one day, Tucker was property of three different NHL teams. Having been a prospect for the Montreal Canadiens since he was a teenager, in June of 1972 the Habs would ship his rights in exchange for cash to the expansion Atlanta Flames, who would then trade Ted to the California Golden Seals that same day. For some players an experience like that may have been disconcerting, but not for Tucker. On the contrary, he felt like he now had opportunity within his grasp. "For the first time I actually felt wanted by an NHL team and I thought that I finally caught a break. Garry Young was the General Manager for the Golden Seals, and he was the one that wanted me in the trade. My first contact with Garry was over the phone, and he said 'Welcome to California!'. I thought that it was a prank call, and kept saying 'Who is this?'. Garry assured me that it was not a prank call, that he would call me back in a couple of days to talk contract with me. I was on Cloud-9. He called me back, and just like that, over the phone we settled on a 2-year contract with a signing bonus included".

Perhaps being a bit overexcited with this lucrative offer from California, Ted accepted the deal without at first considering some of the other incentives that likely could or should have been included. He ended up reaching back out to Young to see if some changes could be made and a restructuring of the deal. "Once everything was starting to sink in, I remembered that I hadn't asked for any performance bonuses, like shutouts, averages, wins, or picking up any awards, so I called him back and explained the situation to him. Garry told me that he would call me back after he looked over what the other goalies were making. He ended calling me back and saying he would be upping my base to \$10,000 the first year and \$12,000 the second year if I were to play in the the minors, and then \$21,000 the first year and \$23,000 the second

year if I made the NHL club, plus bonuses in each league”. Hearing Ted Tucker speak of this, I could see some GMs playing hardball, and saying something to the effect of “Tough luck; you should have asked before”. The fact that Young raised his salary and included the bonuses was testament to the Golden Seals wanting Tucker to be part of their organization.

Tucker would end up playing a full season and a bit more with California’s minor league affiliate, the Salt Lake Golden Eagles, of the Western Hockey League. “The fans were terrific, and the city itself was also terrific. If you looked to the East you would see the mountains, and if you looked to the West you would see the open pit copper mine”. Though it was very scenic and welcoming, Tucker would need to get acclimated to a variance in elevation, as well as a bizarre setup for the team’s rinks. “There were no more bus rides with Salt Lake, as we flew to every city. The one disappointment I had was that even though I liked Al Rollins as a coach, I thought that he would show me more about playing goal as he was a former NHL goalie (Chicago Blackhawks and Toronto Maple Leafs). It was also a test for endurance as now we were playing at 4,200-feet, and when we would play Denver at 5,200-feet the air would be so thin that we would have to carry oxygen tanks on the bench for the players. We also practiced in a satellite rink, as we shared the Palace with the ABA’s Utah Jazz. Two sides of the rink were enclosed, and the other two sides were wide open to the air. Depending on the weather, if it was cold we would leave the pucks at the Palace, and we would skate for anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour, and our trainer would joke that the pucks went to the dry cleaners”.

Low and behold, Ted Tucker would see his first shot at the NHL during the 1973-74 season by appearing in five games with the Golden Seals. It was what he had waited an awful long time for, and the dream had now finally come true. “I was called up as an emergency replacement for Gilles Meloche. What happened was that the back of his hand got cut by the skate of Reggie Leach. From what I was told, a warm up for a game day practice was over, and Reggie says to Gilles that he wanted one more shot. Reggie came down, and somehow his skate ran over the back of Gilles catching glove, which at the time didn’t have the protective cover that is on the back of gloves today. Gilles was very lucky, as a tendon was cut, but they were able to reattach it in an emergency operation. I was there with the team for 3-months”.



Ted Tucker would play 5-games for the 1973-74 Golden Seals, registering 1-win, 1-loss and 1-tie. *(Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker)*

I ask Ted if he remembers his first NHL game and what took place. “I got the call that I had to fly to San Francisco, and then a limo rushed me to the arena because the game had already started. So here I am, rushing to get dressed and when I make my way to the bench during a stoppage in play, and the announcer says my name over the PA system. I get this round of applause from the fans and I’m not even playing in the game! My first playing time though came against the St. Louis Blues. We were losing at the time, Marv Edwards had hurt his knee. I came in off the bench and ended up leading us to a win, which I got credited for”.

Tucker would go on to play in four more games for the Seals after that, finishing his time in the NHL officially with a record of 1-win, 1-loss, and 1-tie across the five games. “My loss was against the Vancouver Canucks, 3-to-2, and the tie game was when I replaced the starting goalie as we were losing and I ended up backstopping us to getting a tie”. Though on the whole, the Seals were among the NHL’s bottom dwellers they still possessed a modest amount of talent during those early to mid-1970s teams with players like Reggie Leach, Ivan Boldirev, Walt McKechnie, and Joey Johnston. It was the core of this Seals roster that really pushed for Tucker to have more opportunity to play. “It was tough sitting on the bench game-in and game-out because I thought to myself ‘Here’s my chance’. Fred Glover, who at the time was the Head Coach, GM, and President of Operations wouldn’t give me a chance to show what I could do. The players were on my side though. During one game at the Coliseum which we were losing, the fans were yelling ‘We want Tucker!’. Joey Johnston and Walt McKechnie both turned to Glover and said, ‘Put the kid in’. But it didn’t happen”.

After all of his time waiting to get there, it seemed that Ted Tucker was still not getting a fair shake at demonstrating how he was capable of performing at the NHL and opportunity was running out. “Another time we were losing 7-to-1 in Pittsburgh, and I figured ‘Okay, I’ll start the 3rd period’. Well I didn’t, but Bob Champoux (third-string goalie after Meloche and Edwards) gives up the 8th goal in the opening minute of the 3rd, and so then Glover says, ‘You’re up. Go in’. I shut them down until a deflection got past me with less than a minute to go in the game. That was the last time I got into a game in the NHL, other than sitting on the bench”. But Ted made it just the same. And if I do say so myself, he did quite well, especially considering that he was playing for the Golden Seals. Just look at the numbers themselves. For the 1973-74 season, the Golden Seals finished dead-last in the league with an abysmal record of 13-55-10. Yet Tucker, in only 5-games, accounted for one of those 13-wins and 1 of those 10-ties. His California teammates provided a minimal support network for any goalie (Ted included), albeit on the stat sheets, as the Seals would only post 195-goals that season, as opposed to allowing 342.

Ted further explains, “When I was there, Glover got fired right near the end of my third month with the team and Marshal Johnston took over as coach. Johnston called me into his office and told me that I had a choice – I could either stay with the big club, or I could go back to Salt Lake to play, and hopefully win a championship as they were going to be in the playoffs. If I had stayed, my next game would have been in Madison Square Garden against the Rangers. But I decided that I would go back to Salt Lake City because I had at least two-and-a-half more months to play, and the Seals’ season was done at the end of the month. Do I regret making this move? The answer is ‘yes’ because I never got another chance to play in the NHL and show them what I could do”.



Ted Tucker would suit up between the pipes of the IHL’s Toledo Goaldiggers through parts of 4 seasons. *(Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker).*

After his lone season in the NHL, Ted Tucker would go onto play six more years of professional hockey in the IHL with six different teams. The teams that Tucker would play for were as colorful as their names; the Toledo Goaldiggers, the Columbus Owls, the Port Huron Flags, the Muskegon Mohawks, the Saginaw Gears, and the Dayton Gems. Tucker would add two more championships to his résumé; in 1974-75 with Toledo, and again in 1980-81 with the Gears. The 1980-81 Turner Cup trophy being a very fitting ending, as that would be Ted Tucker's final season of pro hockey. "I feel very blessed to have been part of four championship teams, between Montreal, Clinton, Toledo and Saginaw. I also played on three runner-ups with the Port Arthur MARRS, Salt Lake City, and with Port Huron".

From those years in the IHL and those championships, I ask Ted to tell me which memories stand out as the most important in his heart. He tells me, "The Toledo Goaldiggers championship means a lot to me, as it is every goalies dream to play in a seventh game on the road, in Saginaw, on the road, before a sell-out. And I played in that game. We arrived back home to a crowd of over 10,000 fans, and it was just one big party downtown". There were a number of other interesting facts that helped make the Toledo team extra special. "First", Ted says, "we were an expansion team in the IHL in 1974, and we barely made the playoffs. I can still remember (Head Coach) Teddy Garvin saying to the press that none of his teams ever backed into the playoffs, but that he would take it that year because we had been in a slump and had been just holding onto the fourth and last spot for the playoffs. We then beat the Columbus Owls in five games, then came back and beat the Dayton Gems in seven, after being down three games to two and facing elimination at home.

One of my favorite stories that Ted Tucker shared with me is the practice after the Goaldiggers had gone down 3-to-2 in the series against Dayton. I immediately cracked a smile and chuckled heartily. "We had just gotten blown out in Dayton to go down 3-to-2. In practice, Garvin told us to all line up on the goal line while he is standing at the blue-line with no skates on. He then says to us, "Who has won championships?". He calls Kent Douglas (who had won the Stanley Cup in 1967 with the Maple Leafs) to the blue-line. Darwin Mott puts up his hand too, and Garvin calls him to the blue-line too. I guess he didn't see my hand, and proceeded to call the rest of us a bunch of losers. He said, 'You quit on me in the last game. Now I'm quitting on you! And you can run your own practice!', and he proceeded to walk off the ice and sit in the stands. Juri Kudrasovs, who was our captain, took over and started running the practice. Meanwhile, Garvin is up there laughing at us and calling us quitters. Juri got really pissed, and flung his stick at Garvin, just barely missing him. The rest is history – we went on to knock off Dayton in seven games".

Six years later, the '80-'81 championship with Saginaw would also be a memorable one for Tucker, but in a different way. "Saginaw is also special to me. It was like a bookend to my career. We only lost one game in all of the three series that we played; winning twelve and losing one. Wren Blair, who was the GM and part owner of the Gears made a comment to us at the banquet that we had actually cost him money, we hadn't played enough home games during the playoff. Out of the three series, we could have played twelve home games as we had home ice advantage throughout the playoffs. Instead, we only ended up playing seven home games, as we swept two series four games to none". After the '81 Turner Cup with the Gears, Tucker would retire but would stay on with the team as their PR man until the franchise folded in April 1983.

Tucker's life after hockey seemed to settle in one location instead of the many that he played in throughout his career. He made a home for himself in Temperance, Michigan where he raised a family and retired

from working with Jeep from the time the Gears folded in 1983 up until May 2008. Ted also coached his son, Travis, through all levels of hockey, up to junior varsity in high school. And up until recently, he kept himself involved in playing in a Sunday night pickup game until last year when he turned 66-years old. These days Tucker loves playing golf, which he informs me is “much easier on the body”.



Picture here at a Toledo alumni game, following his retirement in 1981, Ted Tucker continued to play hockey recreationally until the age of 66. *(Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker).*

I ask Ted Tucker what is the most important thing that he has learned from hockey. “Wow, so many things come to mind. One would be good work ethic. But also integrity. Honesty. And a passion for the game”. Ted goes on further to say, “I don’t believe that the passion is there for the players anymore. It’s about money, and ‘How much can I make?’. When I signed my first NHL pro contract, the minimum was \$15,000, and now it’s \$575,000. I also believe that the new young player doesn’t have the respect of their fellow players as they try to hurt them the first chance they get. Don’t get me wrong; I love a hard-hitting game. But not the cheap headshots you see now in the NHL”.

Tying into what Ted Tucker says, it is obvious to me that this man played the game with a sincere *work ethic* of his own. Every place that he played, he gave it his all and wanted to show that he was capable of being the top netminder. He also exuded a true sense of both *integrity* and *honesty*, in knowing what he wanted and what decisions he chose to make. Choosing hockey over school. Returning to Salt Lake City instead of staying with the Golden Seals. Asking the GM to reconsider and renegotiate his first contract with California for better incentives. Recognizing that he was in fact wanted by an NHL club. Good, bad, ugly, or otherwise, Ted Tucker upheld *his* integrity and his honesty.

But what stands out most to me, personally, and what really makes me admire Ted, is that *passion for the game* the he mentioned. You do not win four championships without that passion. You do not begin your professional career with a championship, nor end it with one, if you do not have that passion. Hell, Ted Tucker also won a championship smack dab in the middle of his career too. Even more noteworthy, you do not tend goal for the greatest junior hockey team ever assembled and go down in history as such, if you do not have his passion either. I want today's NHL young player to be more like Ted. I want them to know his story, and see how this man played the game. He is admirable, and his career means something to hockey. Today's hockey player wanting to be in the NHL, heed the experience and the character of Ted Tucker. After all, he was the goaltender for the greatest junior team of all time.



As a kid, Ted Tucker grew up admiring the Detroit Red Wings even though his own rights belonged to the Montreal Canadiens – contemporary Marcel Dionne is pictured in the background photo. (*Photo provided courtesy of Ted Tucker*).

This article, among many other interesting stories, can be found at Nathaniel Oliver's Musings of a Hockey Enthusiast: <https://musingsofahockeyenthusiast.com/tag/california-golden-seals/>