

that extended from the front office to the stands combined to make O'Ree's stay short.

From the moment he stepped on the ice for the first time, O'Ree was greeted with a barrage of racial taunts from the crowd and opposing teams. He played only 45 games with the Bruins and then returned to the minor leagues where he played until 1974.

In an interview from San Diego, where he sells used cars, O'Ree's voice is bitter as he recalls an incident which took place in Chicago Stadium in 1960.

"We were playing the Black Hawks and several of their players were calling me racist names all night. Then Eric Nesterenko, who loved calling me nigger, butt-ended me and knocked out my two front teeth. I was infuriated so I took my stick and hit him over the head. It almost created a riot, the fans started calling me every racist

name in the book and Blackhawk players were threatening to kill me. I was lucky to get out of the arena alive."

"If I was white I would have played 15 seasons in the NHL," he continues. "After the '58 season Milt Schmidt and Lynn Patrick who ran the team assured me of a spot on the Bruins for the 1959 season. But a couple of weeks later they traded me to the Montreal Canadiens. The Canadiens were run by racists then and they didn't even invite me to try out for the team. They immediately



sent me to a minor league team in Hull."

Although he is often described as the Jackie Robinson of hockey, O'Ree immediately dismisses the comparison.

"I certainly don't consider myself to be anything like Jackie Robinson because Robinson immediately opened the door to blacks in baseball. The next black to step into the NHL after me was Mike Marson 15 years later."

Integration came too late for many great black athletes who could do nothing but lament the fact that they were born too soon.

From 1942 to 1948, hockey fans flocked to arenas all over Quebec to see a spectacle commonly known as "les noirs," the first all-black line in organized hockey.

Herb Carnegie, Manny McIntyre and Ossie Carnegie starred for the Sherbrooke Saints as the trio dominated the scoring statistics of the Quebec Senior League. The league, which was one step away from the NHL, was then grooming future superstars such as Doug Harvey, Jean Beliveau and Punch Imlach.

Wherever "les noirs" played, fans would jam the usually half-empty arenas and local sports-writers soon discovered they were great copy. One night they led Sherbrooke to a 4 - 2 exhibition victory over a Montreal Canadiens squad that featured hockey legends Rocket Richard, Toe Blake and Elmer Lach. It appeared they were about to demolish the racial barrier.

Recalling those days, Manny McIntyre sits in a small parking lot shack outside McGill University, where he works as a security guard.

"We never worried about playing in the NHL because we knew we were good enough to play there and we thought our chance would eventually come," says McIntyre, who was equally adept as a second baseman and became the first black Canadian to sign a professional baseball contract in 1947.

He turns down the volume on his portable radio to make his next point as his face narrows in a frown. "But when players who couldn't even tie our shoelaces started moving up to the NHL and we never got called, we realized we'd never get

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