

Volant name precious to sports fans

Mention the name Hull Volant to any athletically inclined youngster and he'll gladly offer to trade his most treasured hockey cards and autographs to wear their renowned uniform.

Play a word association game with a sports oriented Hull resident, confronting him with "black and white" and "wings" and the instant response will be "Hull Volant."

Drop the same name into a conversation with North American softball types and the likely response is: "We remember them, a first class team and organization."

This is the Hull Volant Athletic and Social Association.

Their outstanding reputation on and off the sports field and congenial French Canadian atmosphere has attracted Hull and area athletes as a magnet lures iron filings into its field.

"Talk about sports in Hull and you talk about the Hull Volant," said a smiling Emile Sabourin, club director of sports.

"There is a lot of prestige in playing for the Volants," said Sabourin, sipping a beer in the club room of the association's Notre Dame Avenue headquarters.

"The players are treated

well. Each team has a dressing room, showers and lockers and their uniforms are cleaned after every game. And when they are not playing ball (or hockey) they are here involved in cards and talking sports," continued the jovial member, who added opposition players occasionally drop by to trade stories.

"If you can't play for the Volants, you can help out in a tournament and still be around the park. I never played ball, but it's great to just be around the players," Sabourin said in reference to softball, the club's present athletic forte. "I'm organizing an international tournament for next week and I have more volunteers than I need."

Over 43 years, the club has channeled thousands of dollars to sponsor hundreds of teams in a broad range of sports including softball, hockey, baseball, bicycling, basketball, bowling, football and track and field.

In return for their investment, they've produced numerous champions and pennant winners in most sports since 1932. Softball alone has chalked up nearly 20 titles in 25 years, according to Sabourin.

But the Volant organiza-

tion has never fallen prey to the winning-means-everything attitude.

Claude Deschamps, a softball enthusiast and Canadian Amateur softball association executive director, says the Volants entice players with quality equipment and competition and all-expense paid tournaments, rather than pay cash for their services.

"The club first takes care of its members, then it promotes the teams," said Deschamps. "they want good teams, but they want to promote them as truly amateur."

While softball and hockey are the club's main thrusts, the Hull Volants were originally conceived out of a football challenge.

The now defunct B and A athletic association

posed the football invitation to 20 men, who accepted and formed the Hull Flyers. Under their first president, Le Progres de Hull sports editor Aldoria "Coco" Jarry, the Flyers won the four-team league title before perishing after one year.

In 1933, sportsman Charles D'Aoust convinced members an English nickname did not fit with the French Canadian spirit of the association. So, they agreed to the French version of Flyers — Volant.

The initial group of 20 supported the club's ambitions by paying five cents a week for a membership. Today, nearly 600 members spend \$10 a year for all athletic and social benefits.

Fire destroyed their first clubhouse, including all record books, situated above a restaurant on Victoria Street. The Volant club moved around the corner to a larger second storey building on Maison-neuve Boulevard before being expropriated five years ago.

"Bob Guertin was the godfather for this club, but a godfather in good sense," said Sabourin. "He kept the Hull Volant existing by paying the bills and taxes in the depression and hard years that followed."

"He paid for all bus transportation and sent the hockey team to Europe for two tours," he added. "Without him there would be no club today."

The first overseas journey was a reward for their surprising performance in the 1937-38 Allan Cup semi-finals. The other European tour was after the 1938-39 season.

"The Volant were a group of has-beens expected to lose to the powerful Quebec Aces," recalled former Le Droit sports writer Henri Laperriere. "But their spirit made them a Cinderella team, a miracle team."

That series set a single game attendance record — 9,200 — at the old Ottawa Auditorium. But overzealous fans in both cities forced the final game of the playoff to be moved to Montreal.

"The series produced too much trouble in the two cities, so the final was at the Forum," continued the former president of the Institut Canadien Francais D'Ottawa. "In fact, Louis St. Denis, the Hull goalie, was often bothered by the Quebec fans who flung

things at him with slingshots.

"They beat Quebec, but were too tired when they faced Sudbury, who won the cup."

Sabourin's fondest memories remain in the realm of softball. The Volants, recognized for their distinctive black and white uniforms and winged crest, had prosperous years in the old Commercial League and are continuing their success in the Metro League. But in 1971 they were pilgrims in the American Seaboard League.

"I managed that team and for months before the league began that year we'd travel 550 miles to Stratford, Conn., for a two-hour meeting once a month. We wanted to play in the best softball league. It was worth the entire effort," remembered Sabourin.

"That was our most famous year. The team finished third and the experts said we wouldn't place in the top five."

The team was allotted a budget of \$27,000, but the players raised most of the money through raffles and draws and required only \$3,000 from the association.

That policy of collectivism remains the basis of all Hull Volant undertakings.

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Operetta lovers well served by Hull's Theatre Lyrique

Operetta lovers in Hull have been well served for the past 11 years.

Every spring, Theatre Lyrique de Hull presents its annual production and over the years these have included La Fille de Madame Angot, La Mascotte and Les Cloches de Corneville.

Theatre Lyrique de Hull was formed in 1964 by drama school director Rene Provost, with the assistance of Jacqueline Martin, Pierre Collien and Mrs. Lucien Bigras.

The present company, composed of 50 members including six soloists, is under the direction of two musical

directors, Yvon Thibodeau, with pianist Yves Beuparlant, conducts the group in popular music numbers, and Gaston Lebel, accompanied by pianist Yvon Deziel, directs the opera productions.

As part of its contribution to the 100th anniversary celebrations, Theatre Lyrique de Hull presented an original work by Lucien Ricard entitled Chantons Cent Ans, a mixture of popular and operatic themes.

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