

Peter Correnty



Peter Correnty was more than just a successful hockey coach. And he was certainly quite a bit more than a sharp general manager with an eye for talent.

Instead, Correnty represented an era in Norwalk sports history. An era when semi-pro hockey put the city he was born and raised in on the map.

Peter Correnty was the Home Oilers, the hockey team that during the 1960s delighted local fans on many winter nights at the old Crystal Rink on Crescent Street.

And a half-century after the Home Oilers' first season in Norwalk, Correnty is once again in the spotlight as a Norwalk Old Timers award winner.

Not bad for someone who only played one year of organized hockey, and that as a senior at Norwalk High School during the winter of 1948-49.

"I was the leading scorer on the team," he pointed out, before explaining why he didn't play his sophomore and junior years. "I refereed hockey games. I got paid to do that and I needed the money to help out my family."

But Correnty, who still carries his referee card from the American Hockey Association with him, frequented Crystal Rink even before he got to high school.

"I was only 13 or 14 and I did all kinds of jobs there. I sharpened skates, I policed the ice, I gave skating lessons, I helped out at the concession stand when they needed me. I did everything."

Now fast forward to 1954 when Correnty got out of the Navy and went to work for the Home Oil Company in New Canaan as operations manager. At the

time, he knew Leo Skidd, the owner of the Crystal Rink, was looking for a team. Correnty also knew the Norwalk Hockey Team, an independent club, was looking for a sponsor.

So he approached the powers that be at the Home Oil Company, whose owner happened to be a big hockey, and a few games into the 1959-60 season the company bought the team new uniforms. And Skidd welcomed the team to Crystal Rink with open arms,

With that, big time hockey was about to come to Norwalk, thanks in large part to Pete Correnty, who was named coach and general manager.

He gradually brought in former college All-Americans, Ivy League talent and other top players. He also upgraded the schedule, bringing in some of the top amateur teams from New England to Crystal Rink.

"We built up a good reputation and teams started contacting me to play us."

In 1963, just four years into their existence, the Home Oil Hockey Club from Norwalk jumped up to semi-professional and began acquiring former pro stars, many of them Canadians.

"The first pro I got was Don Atamanchuk," Correnty said. "He was the top pick of the New York Rangers."

Correnty also brought in John Sherban, who a few years earlier led the Eastern League in scoring with 49 goals and 60 assists. Atamanchuk and Sherban were two of 15 pro players Correnty signed. This at a time when there were only six teams – and approximately 150 players – in the NHL, compared to 30 teams and 750 players today.

"I had three players make the U.S. National hockey team (including Minnesota native Charlie Brown who captained the 1972 U.S. Silver Medal-winning team) and altogether 15 pros played for me," Correnty said. "There's no doubt in my mind they could have all played in the NHL."

Of course, there was a price to pay for such good talent.

"We paid most of our players," Correnty said. "So I started a program book and went out and sold ads."

He also handled the scheduling and travel arrangements (like flying to Montreal), and built an ever-growing fan club base. Not to mention find time to coach and be general manager.

Correnty did one more thing. He eventually changed the name of the team from the Home Oil Hockey Club to the "Home Oilers."

"We were the Oilers before the Edmonton Oilers," he noted, before adding with a laugh, "They copied it from me. I didn't copy it from them."

In their first season of semipro play, the Oilers went 15-3, including wins over the New York and New Jersey state champs. In the 1968-69 season, they faced Canadian teams for the first time, winning seven of nine games and finishing 17-2-1 overall.

Then in 1971, Correnty was one of the founders of the Canadian-American Hockey League, which was made up of the Home Oilers and three Canadian teams the first year. The Oilers won the inaugural championship and repeated as regular-season champs the following year before losing to Montreal 6-5 in overtime in the playoff finals.

The Home Oilers continued to enjoy success even after the Can-Am League grew to 11 teams, including seven from Canada. In 10 seasons as a semipro team, the Home Oilers compiled an impressive record of 155-31-11, all under Correnty.

Many of those wins came before capacity crowds at Crystal Rink, although the team, with its sizable following, eventually outgrew the Norwalk rink and moved to the more spacious Wonderland of Ice in Bridgeport.

During his tenure, Correnty was also appointed Director of Hockey for the state of Connecticut. But hockey wasn't the only sport he was involved in. He was one of the co-founders of the Brien McMahon Babe Ruth League, and served as league secretary while managing the Home Oil team to the league championship. One of his players was Pat Vigilio, one of his fellow Norwalk Old Timers honorees tonight.

Correnty has also been active with the Kiwanis Club and the Norwalk Museum, where he still volunteers his time.

The lifelong Norwalk resident is married to the former Barbara Severini and they have four children, Peter Jr., Laura, Michael (a former quarterback and baseball player at Brien McMahon), and Lisa. They also have four grandchildren.