

BY MARC EDGE

Flashback

Red Dutton is still bitter about the Brooklyn hockey team that never was. A retired millionaire living in Calgary, Dutton bristles anew when he recalls how he was spurned by Madison Square Garden and the NHL in 1946. A star defenseman with the Montreal Maroons and the New York Americans in the 1920s and '30s, Dutton was renowned for his hard-hitting play. He sent many players to hospital and often wound up there himself.

After the old Western Professional League folded, Dutton entered the NHL at 28 and played 10 years there. That he played at all was a miracle. As a teenager during World War I, he took 48 metal fragments that mangled his leg and ripped out a slice of hip muscle. Dutton refused to let doctors amputate the leg, instead suffering 14 months with his leg hoisted at a 30-degree angle. Returning to his native Winnipeg, he built up strength working construction by day and playing hockey all night in as many as seven different city leagues.

Dutton acquired a share of the Americans while still a player when he loaned the owner money to meet the payroll. He lost none of his color, first as player-coach, then coach and general manager, of the Amerks back when they were the only hockey team in New York City.

But then came the Rangers, owned by Madison Square Garden, and while the teams had a fierce on-ice rivalry, they clashed most seriously at the box office. Both played at Madison Square. "When you walked in the door, the Rangers ticket office was right in front," recalls Dutton. "You couldn't find our ticket office without a lot of looking. We were really fighting for fans in those days. The Garden ticket sellers were instructed to sell tickets for the

Marc Edge last wrote about David Babych in October.

Rangers' games, even if we had a game that night."

When the United States entered World War II, Dutton lost 15 of his 20 players to the military after the '41-'42 season and the Americans folded, much to the delight of Garden management. The demise of the pesky Amerks enabled Madison Square to put their 25 home dates to more profitable use. But, to show no ill will, the Garden offered Dut-



ton a job running hockey operations for the corporation. He turned it down to run his own construction firm in Calgary. Dutton was well on the road to his first million when less than a year later he received an emergency call from NHL headquarters. League president Frank Calder had suffered a heart attack during a governors meeting in Toronto midway through the '42-'43 season. Would Dutton replace him

until a successor could be found? Dutton agreed. But no one looked for a replacement. "I had planned to be back to my business in three weeks," says Dutton, laughing. "My three weeks became three years."

Dutton served under the proviso that if he could build a rink, he would be awarded a franchise in Brooklyn after the war ended. During their final year Dutton had moved the Amerks practices to Flatbush and renamed the team the Brooklyn Americans in hopes of attracting fans from across the bridge. He believed a rink in Brooklyn would sell the team. "Brooklyn was my first choice," says Dutton. "They were rowdy fans, but they stuck with us."

After the league selected Clarence Campbell to be its next president, Dutton stayed on a half-year to break in the new man. Meanwhile, he was raising money for a rink to house his promised team.

But Madison Square Garden had other ideas. Its management lobbied hard against Dutton's team. His franchise bid was rejected. "I had \$7 million for a rink, but Conn Smythe talked for Madison Square Garden," says Dutton bitterly. "They said they had plans for a second team in New York, but it never materialized. Two clubs would have taken away from their crowds. With one team they had sellouts every night. They had a lot of power and did everything to keep me out."

More than 25 years later New York finally got its second hockey team, but the years have done little to temper Dutton's rancor. "I haven't been in an NHL rink since," he spits. "Hockey is out of my blood now. It was so thick in my blood at one time that I couldn't sleep. Maybe it's a good thing I didn't get it because Brooklyn has gone downhill ever since the ball club left. In hindsight, I should have looked at Jersey."