Vernon Essos ruled BC Junior Hockey 50 years ago

Essos beat Victoria Cougars four games to two in 1970 to win city's first junior hockey title

ROGER KNOX The Moringstar Nov. 25, 2020 12:00 p.m.

Jack Marsh, who scored the Cup-winning goal, and Vernon Essos head coach Odie Lowe hold aloft the Mowat Cup B.C. Junior Hockey League championship trophy following the Essos' series-clinching Game 6 win in Victoria over the Cougars in 1970. It was the first B.C. junior hockey title for the Vernon franchise. (Doug Bulwer photo, courtesy of Jack Marsh)

They were a team that had six players, including a defenceman, with 60 or more points. A goalie who didn't start the post-season then went on an amazing roll. A team with the "perfect coach" for them and a general manager that loved the players.

The Vernon Essos of 1969-70 won the first of what is now a franchise- and league-best 12 B.C. Hockey League championships 50 years ago and a number of players from that team that called the Vernon Civic Arena home remember the title vividly.

The late Wayne Dye – son of general manager Vern Dye and voted Vernon's athlete of the 20th century – led the team in scoring with 38 goals and 46 assists for 84 points, five better than Quesnel import Lawrence Quechuck, retired and living in Vernon. John (Wire) Price 0f Cranbook and Don Manson of Revelstoke tied for third with 68 points.

The team captain, Vernon's Bob Mayer, who died in 2019, was fifth in scoring with 63 points and was named league MVP. Jack Marsh of Quesnel (35-25-60) rounded out the 60-point club on the Essos, who finished first in the seven-team league (Kelowna Buckaroos, Penticton Broncos, Kamloops Rockets, Victoria Cougars, Vancouver Centennials, New Westminster Royals) with a 32-12-4 record.

The Essos played the Centennials in the league semifinals. After dropping the first two games at the Civic, the Essos rebounded, winning four games to three with a 6-2 victory in Game 7 at home to advance to the championship best-of-seven against the Cougars.

Marsh scored the series- and championship-winning goal in Victoria in Game 6.

"It was just a great bunch of guys," said Marsh, now 70, taking a snow shovelling break from his home in Quesnel, reflecting on that championship squad. He returned after his junior career to play senior hockey for, and later coached, the storied Quesnel Kangaroos, a squad that won seven straight provincial senior titles in the 1980s.

Marsh worked for the City of Quesnel for 37 years, retiring as director of public works. He and Quechuck were classmates in elementary school, and Marsh also brought to Vernon younger brother Jim, a stalwart on the Essos' blueline.

‘“We had a lot of good hockey players and we all got along well,” said Marsh. “We worked hard, we had tough guys like Bob Craig (from Surrey, whose brother, Dale, was also on the squad) and we had guys who could score like Wayne, Lawrence, Wire and myself.”

The team had two goalies in Salmon Arm's Gord Mackintosh and Gary Osborne of Kamloops. Mackintosh, who along with partner Roy Sakaki ran the Enderby and Salmon Arm hockey schools for three decades, started the playoffs against Vancouver.

He gave up a soft goal in Game 1, and when the Cents scored on a 200-foot shot in Game 2, head coach Odie Lowe pulled Mackintosh in favour of Osborne.

“I never saw the ice again,” laughed Mackintosh, retired from a career with the B.C. Liquor Stores. He and Osborne both live in Salmon Arm. “Gary was absolutely amazing. He was unconscious. He's one of the big reasons why we won the league.”

After winning the BCHL title, the Essos then played the Weyburn Red Wings of Saskatchewan for the Western Canadian championship. Vernon won the first two games before capacity crowds at the Civic but then lost four straight in Saskatchewan.

“It was a great club and we went on a long playoff run. I remember playing 15 games in 20 days,” said Price, who was scouted by coach Odie Lowe's brother in his native Cranbrook. Price played some senior hockey with his hometown Cranbrook Royals and with the

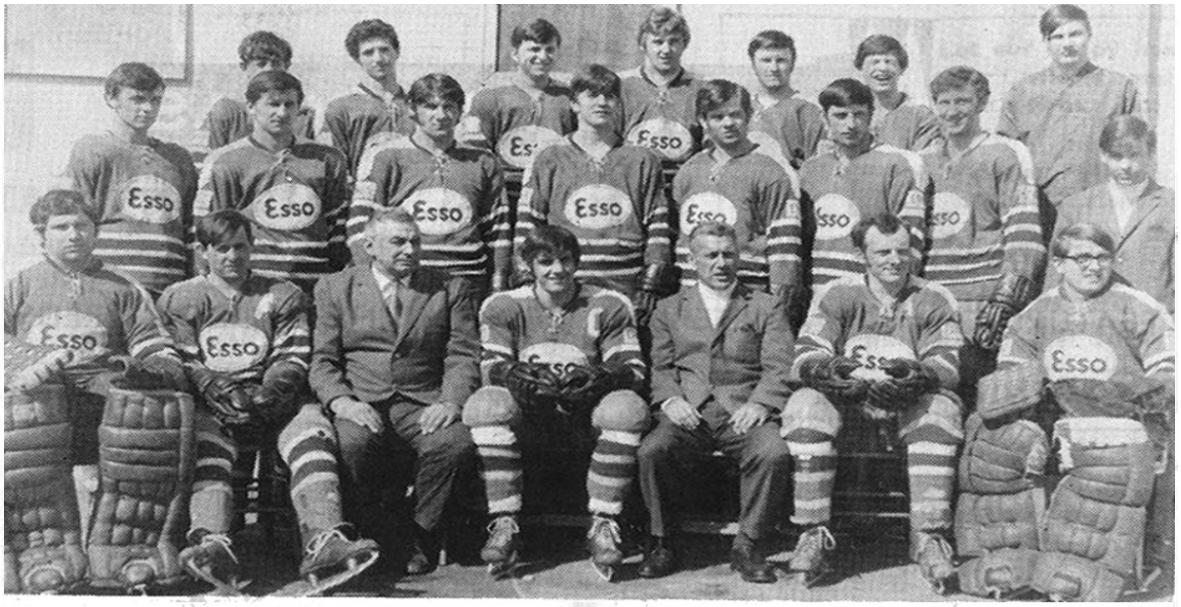
Kangaroos in Quesnel when his job with Inland Kenworth took him to the Cariboo. Price retired from Kenworth in Vernon, where he still resides.

Mayer scored 22 goals and added 41 assists and was the silent leader of the Essos.
“He played the power play, defended well, worked harder than anybody and led the practices,” said Quechuck in a 2019 interview after Mayer’s death.

“He was quiet, but he was a leader by example,” said Essos teammate Jim Inglis who played several games with the Essos in the championship year along with fellow Vernon Junior B call-up Bruce Ritchie.

Melding the players into a championship squad was 1956 Vernon Canadians Allan Cup winner Odie Lowe, as head coach, along with general manager Vern Dye. Lowe, now in his 90s, still lives in Vernon. Dye passed away in 2004. Off the ice, the players would hang out together at Vern’s Pool Hall on 30th Avenue.

“Every player had respect for Odie and Vern,” said Price. “They took very good care of us. They were like second fathers to us.”
Other players on the first Vernon junior hockey championship squad included Barry Bleakley, Bill Owens, Dale Pentland, Al Wahlstrom, Gord Merritt, Gordon Osinchuk and Ken Warner. Vernon’s Jock Worth was the team trainer.

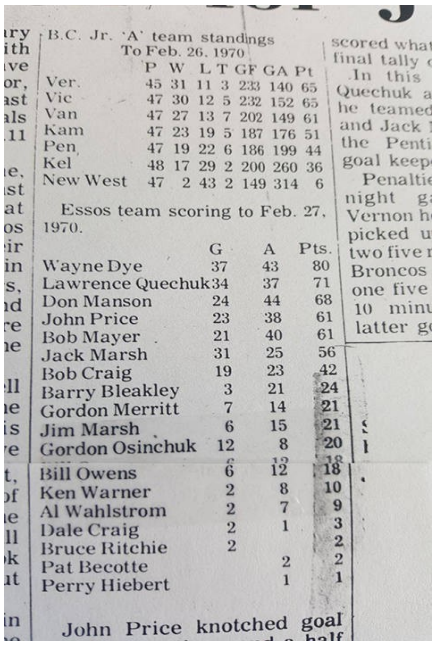


B.C. JUNIOR A HOCKEY CHAMPIONS FOR 1969-70 SEASON

Seated left to right: Gary Osborne, Lawrence Quechuk, Mgr. Vern Dye, Cpt. Bob Mayer, Coach Odie Lowe, Barry Bleakely, Gordon MacIntosh.
Second row left to right: Wayne Dye, Dale Craig, Bill Owens, Jim Marsh, Dale Pentland, Don Manson, Al Wahlstrom and Jock Worth.
Third row left to right: Bob Craig, John Price, Gordon Merritt, Gordon Osinchuk, Ken Warner, Jack Marsh and Art Pagee.

With three games left in the 1969-70 regular-season, the Vernon News printed the updated B.C. Junior Hockey League standings and Vernon Essos' team scoring. The Essos went on to win the BCJHL title, the first of a league-best 12 championships. (Courtesy of John Price)

Individual shots of the 1969-70 Vernon Essos, BCHL champs. (Courtesy of John Price)



B.C. Jr. 'A' team standings
To Feb. 26, 1970

	P	W	L	T	GF	GA	Pt
Ver.	45	31	11	3	233	140	65
Vic	47	30	12	5	232	152	65
Van	47	27	13	7	202	149	61
Kam	47	23	19	5	187	176	51
Pen	47	19	22	6	186	199	44
Kel	48	17	29	2	200	260	36
New West	47	2	43	2	149	314	6

Essos team scoring to Feb. 27, 1970.

	G	A	Pts.
Wayne Dye	37	43	80
Lawrence Quechuk	34	37	71
Don Manson	24	44	68
John Price	23	38	61
Bob Mayer	21	40	61
Jack Marsh	31	25	56
Bob Craig	19	23	42
Barry Bleakley	3	21	24
Gordon Merritt	7	14	21
Jim Marsh	6	15	21
Gordon Osinchuk	12	8	20
Bill Owens	6	12	18
Ken Warner	2	8	10
Al Wahlstrom	2	7	9
Dale Craig	2	1	3
Bruce Ritchie	2		2
Pat Becotte		2	2
Perry Hiebert		1	1

John Price knotched goal

ail to the league champs

GORDON MACKINTOSH

DON MANSON

WAYNE DYE

BILL OWENS

JOHN PRICE

JACK MARSH

LAWRENCE QUEICHUK

GORDON OSINCHUK

GORDON MERRITT

BOB MAYER

JIM MARSH

BARRY BLEAKELY

AL WAHLSTROM

DALE CRAIG

BOB CRAIG

ODIE LOWE

VERN DYE