

# Reg Sinclair: a good man gone, but not forgotten

RON BARRY INSIDE THE GAME

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Former New York Ranger Reg Sinclair died recently in Rothesay.

Photo: Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal Archive

The Cathedral of St. John the Devine occupies a sizable space in Manhattan's Morningside Heights neighbourhood. With an interior spanning the length of two football fields and covering an area of 121,000 square feet, it's easy to believe that it is the fourth-largest Christian church in the world.

Across Amsterdam Avenue and a stone's throw away from the cathedral is the Hungarian Pastry

Shop. It's in this famous tiny landmark where I met a gentleman who knew Reg Sinclair and watched him play for the New York Rangers in the early 1950s.

It was the afternoon of Nov. 5 and for two hours, Stan Fischler served up anecdotes from hockey and baseball that no boulangerie could match, with apologies to the culinary world. Certainly, Fischler is among the game's deity of reporters and analysts. Known as 'The Hockey Maven', he is a historian, author, broadcaster and professor. He is the resident expert in all things hockey for the Madison Square Garden Network. He's won New York Emmy Awards and put his name to more than 90 books. His most recent work, "We Are The Rangers", offers readers an oral history of one of the National Hockey League's Original Six franchises.

All of which brings us to Reginald Alexander Sinclair.

New York was the first of two NHL stops for Sinclair before he left hockey for a career in the soft drink business, eventually settling in the Kennebecasis Valley in the late 1970s where he resided until he passed away Nov. 14 after a brief illness. He was 88.

News of his passing took Fischler back in time – to an era when hockey was played more and analyzed less... the days of Howe, 'The Rocket', train rides and yes, Reg Sinclair.

"I remember Reg well as a Ranger for a few reasons," offered Fischler. "He was a rarity; a college grad who had a more erudite – but always pleasant – air about him. Reg came to the club for the 1950-51 season, an especially tough one for the Blueshirts since they had gone to double-overtime of Game 7 of the final in the spring of 1950 before losing to Detroit. Many things went wrong the following year but one of them was not Sinclair. He played the game smart and hard. Push Reggie and he pushed back."

New York Rangers director of player personnel, Gordie Clark, never met Sinclair, but knew he was part of the Rangers' family.

"I did not have the pleasure of meeting Reg, unfortunately," said the former Saint John resident, who was in between scouting trips to Russia and western Canada. "I have had the pleasure of working for two Original Six teams – Boston and New York – so I value the players from past teams and had the pleasure to work with many of them. Reg's name came up frequently. I have read about his great hockey career and beautiful family."

Sinclair was born in Lachine, Que., in 1925 and raised in the hockey mecca of Montreal. Before landing in the NHL, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). After the Second World War, he attended McGill University in Montreal and earned his Commerce degree. He played hockey for the Redmen, where he still holds scoring records – including 10 points in a single game against the University of Montreal – and was inducted into the university's sports hall of fame as both a team member and a player.

His time in the NHL was brief, but productive. To wit:

- He scored 49 goals and had 92 points in 208 games, spread over three seasons.

- He led all rookies – and the Rangers – in scoring in 1950-51 with 18 goals and 39 points. The following year, he had 20 goals and 10 assists for 30 points.
- He represented the Rangers in back-to-back all-star games.
- His final season was spent with the Detroit Red Wings, where he posted 11-12-23 numbers playing alongside Gordie Howe – the Sinclairs and Howes would become life-long friends – and other hall of famers such as Ted Lindsay, Alex Delvecchio, Red Kelly and Terry Shawchuk.

By all accounts, the 1952-53 Red Wings offered Sinclair his best shot at hockey immortality. The Red Wings won the regular-season pennant by a country mile and were odds-on favourites to have their names emblazoned on the Stanley Cup. But something happened en route to their victory parade – Detroit was stunned 4-2 by the Boston Bruins in a six-game semifinal. The upstart Bruins would lose 4-1 in the final to Maurice Richard and the Canadiens, and Sinclair would leave the NHL behind for a career in business.

His brief stint in New York left an impression on Fischler, then a young man from Brooklyn developing his talent for the craft of journalism that would lead to a Lester Patrick Trophy in 2007 for his contribution to hockey in the United States.

“As a Rangers fan still in Brooklyn College, I attended every home game that Sinclair played in for two straight seasons in New York and rated him among my top three favourites,” said Fischler. “As vice-president of the Rangers Fan Club, I got to know him a bit more personally and found him to be the way everyone else did – friendly, intelligent and a pleasure to be around. My only gripe was that he left the Rangers scene far too soon but I’ll say this for Reg, he knew what he wanted and followed through on his game of life.”

Reg would carve a niche for himself in the soft drink business after he left hockey. By the late 1970s, he had settled in as president and partner with Maritime Beverages Ltd., a Pepsi bottler based in Saint John, and resided in Rothesay – close enough to the historic 18-hole layout at Riverside Country Club where he would enjoy many a round of golf.

He would go on to notable accomplishments close at home and regionally, serving as president of Saint John Board of Trade and becoming a board member of the Children’s Hospital in Halifax. But there was this “hockey thing” about the man that added another layer of quality to repertory: he once coached at Rothesay Collegiate School (now Rothesay Netherwood School), he played with the Ken-Gents Oldtimers’ team and was part of the Montreal Canadiens Oldtimers, even though he never played for the Bleu Blanc Rouge.

Our condolences go out to his wife of 63 years, Ronni, his family and friends.

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