

Alex Carey, Athlete - Lacrosse

By Grant Granger



Like most Burnaby boys in the 1940s and '50s, **Alex Carey** played several sports, excelling at many of them like baseball, soccer and basketball. But the one to stick (pun intended) was lacrosse.

And it was his sleight of stick that earned him induction into the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 2000 and now into the Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame. Carey's trademark move was a fake that fooled left defenders and allowed him to accumulate 228 goals and 252 assists for 480 points in 334 regular season games in the Western Lacrosse Association. Carey had another 84 points, including 38 goals in 81 post-season games for a career total of 564 points.

"I could twirl my stick as though as I was throwing the ball and still have it in my stick. I guess I was so effective with it it looked like I still had the ball, and I was able to do other things with it like shoot or pass," recalls Carey. "Ever since I was a kid, I was a playmaker. I worked hard at playing with the stick, and my body motions as well, but the fake ... it was just something I just worked on."

Carey learned his lacrosse in East Burnaby after his family moved from Vernon. There were some sticks in the basement so he and his brothers — Pat, Bob and Jack — naturally gravitated to an empty lot on 13th Avenue cleared by minor lacrosse organizer George Pittendrigh, who is also being inducted into the Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame this year, and to the box at Richmond Park.

"The whole neighbourhood just joined in," says Carey.

When he wasn't playing with his Burnaby buddies he'd be bouncing a ball off a backyard shed.

"The shingles were in terrible shape. But dad was pretty good, he'd fix it up again," laughs Carey.

In his junior days, Carey formed a formidable line with fellow Burnaby boys Gord Gimple and Fred Usselman. Together in the Western Lacrosse Association with the Vancouver Capilanos/Burrards and Coquitlam Adanacs they put up 2,297 points.

“I was the digger, Freddie was the shooter and Gordie was the playmaker and a very effective shooter. We just seemed to gel, it just worked out good,” says Carey. “Both the Minto Cup and the two Mann Cup championships I was in, we were the go-to forward line. There were so many different times when we came through.”

Carey and Co. won a Minto Cup junior Canadian championship in 1956 and Canadian senior Mann Cup titles in 1961 and 1964. (He missed out on the team’s 1963 Mann Cup victory because of a back injury.)

The 1964 team pulled off a remarkable victory by rebounding from a 3-1 series deficit to defeat the Brooklin Hillcrests in seven games in the stifling Ontario heat and humidity. Their exploits earned the team a spot in the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame.

“That was outstanding. It doesn’t happen very often, but we did have a very big comeback. We just played as a team and we just kept coming back,” says Carey. The next year the trio joined the expansion Adanacs with Carey playing six seasons in Coquitlam before retiring, although he stuck around with the A’s as an assistant coach and a team vice-president. In 1968, the Adanacs went south of the border where he got to play alongside a lacrosse legend.

“We played a pro season out of Portland and we had Jack Bionda on the team,” says Carey, who graduated from Burnaby South in 1954 and lived and coached minor lacrosse in the city until 1990 and is now a Langley resident. “Jack was a wonderful, wonderful lacrosse player and to play a season with him was quite outstanding.”

(Grant Granger is chair of the Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame)

• *The 18th annual Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame banquet will be held at the Metrotown Firefighters club banquet hall, 6515 Bonsor Ave., Burnaby, on Thursday, Feb 28 (reception 6 p.m., dinner 7 p.m.) Tickets are available at tickets09@shaw.ca or by phoning Rosemary at 604-436-1672.*