

Canadiens Cup champion coach Ruel dies at 76

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Claude Ruel, who was part of seven Stanley Cup championships with the Montreal Canadiens, died Monday at age 76.

"It's with sadness that we learned the passing of Claude Ruel, a great builder in our franchise history," Canadiens owner Geoff Molson wrote on his verified Twitter account. "My condolences to the Ruel family."

Ruel was the Canadiens' director of scouting when he was elevated to coach for the 1968-69 season, replacing Toe Blake. He guided the Canadiens to the best record in the League with 103 points. They swept the New York Rangers in the quarterfinals and beat the Boston Bruins in six games in the semifinals. In the Cup Final the Canadiens swept the St. Louis Blues.

The Canadiens missed the playoffs the following season, and he resigned 23 games into the 1970-71 season.

In 1975 he returned to the Canadiens as director of player development and served in that role until 1995, with the exception of the 1979-80 and 1980-81 seasons, when he went back to coaching the team. He was part of Canadiens teams that won the Stanley Cup four straight times between 1976 and 1979, and again in 1986 and 1993.

"He was a great teacher and he always wanted so much for you to make it," Canadiens forward Yvan Cournoyer told the Montreal Gazette. "You could feel that."

Former Canadiens forward Chris Nilan wrote on his verified Twitter account, "I loved this man. The single most important person in my development as a hockey player. I am grateful and blessed to know him."

Born in Sherbrooke, Quebec on Sept. 12, 1938, Ruel is credited with developing many of the star players that helped fuel the Canadiens dynasty of the late 1970s, most notably the franchise's all-time leader in points, Guy Lafleur. When Hockey Hall of Fame defenseman Guy Lapointe had his No 5 jersey retired by the Canadiens on Nov. 8, he mentioned Ruel in his speech as being a mentor and expressed his gratitude for the role Ruel played in his career.

Ruel's death is another significant loss for the Canadiens this season. On Nov. 26 former Canadiens forward Gilles Tremblay, who went on to become a Hockey Hall of Fame member as a broadcaster, died Nov. 26. And on Dec. 2 Canadiens legend Jean Beliveau died.

Tremblay and Beliveau both played for Ruel on the 1969 Cup Championship team. Ruel attended Beliveau's state funeral and was seen greeting many of the players he helped develop in the back of the church.



Geoff Molson

@GMolsonCHC

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