

= Bill Masterton =

William John " Bill " Masterton (August 13 , 1938 ? January 15 , 1968) was a Canadian ? American professional ice hockey centre who played in the National Hockey League (NHL) for the Minnesota North Stars in 1967 ? 68 . He is the only player in NHL history to die as a direct result of injuries suffered during a game , the result of massive head injuries suffered following a hit during a January 13 , 1968 , contest against the Oakland Seals .

A college standout with the Denver Pioneers , Masterton was a member of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship teams in 1960 and 1961 , was twice an NCAA All @-@ Star and was the most valuable player of the 1961 NCAA Division I Men 's Ice Hockey Tournament . He briefly played in the Montreal Canadiens organization before settling in Minnesota where he played senior hockey . The NHL 's 1967 expansion offered an opportunity to play for the newly founded North Stars , for whom he scored the first goal in the franchise 's history .

Masterton 's death sparked a long @-@ running debate in hockey about the merits of wearing helmets , as few NHL players did so in that time . Despite several efforts to mandate their use , it was 11 years before the NHL made them compulsory for all new players beginning in the 1979 ? 80 season . In his memory , the NHL created the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy which it has awarded since 1968 to a player who demonstrates perseverance and dedication to hockey . The North Stars retired his jersey number 19 , an honour that followed the franchise when it later relocated to Dallas , Texas .

= = Playing career = =

A native of Winnipeg , Manitoba , Masterton played two seasons of junior hockey with the St. Boniface Canadiens in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League (MJHL) . He averaged a goal per game and finished with 49 points in 22 games in 1955 ? 56 as the Canadiens won the Turnbull Cup . He added eight points in six games during the Memorial Cup playdowns , however St. Boniface failed to reach the national championship final . Following a second season in which he recorded 53 points in 30 games , Masterton chose to attend the University of Denver where he was offered a scholarship to play with the Denver Pioneers hockey program .

Masterton played three seasons in Denver between 1958 and 1961 , appearing in a total of 89 games , scoring 66 goals and 196 points in that time . At the time of his graduation , he was the Pioneers ' all @-@ time leading point scorer , a record he held for 25 years . He was a two @-@ time NCAA All @-@ American and was twice named to the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA) All @-@ Star team , earning both awards in 1960 and 1961 . Masterton led the WCHA in scoring in 1959 ? 60 with 44 points in conference play , and led Denver to the 1960 NCAA national championship . Masterton served as team captain for 1960 ? 61 , and was named the most valuable player of the 1961 national championship as he led Denver to a second consecutive title . The Pioneers finished the season with a 30 ? 1 ? 1 record and were hailed as " the greatest hockey team to ever represent an American college or university . "

Turning to professional hockey after graduating with an engineering degree , Masterton signed a contract with the Montreal Canadiens in 1961 . Led by Jean Béliveau and Henri Richard , the Canadiens were extremely deep at centre , so Masterton was assigned to the Hull @-@ Ottawa Canadiens of the Eastern Professional Hockey League . He had 31 goals and 65 points for Hull @-@ Ottawa , placing him in the top ten in both categories . Masterton was promoted to the Cleveland Barons of the American Hockey League (AHL) for the 1962 ? 63 season , where he led the team with 82 points . He finished as the runner up to Doug Robinson for the Dudley " Red " Garrett Memorial Award as the AHL 's top rookie .

Faced with little opportunity to make the Montreal roster , Masterton left the professional game to complete his master 's degree at the University of Denver . He settled in Minneapolis , Minnesota , where he took a job in contracts administration . He joined the Honeywell Corporation where he worked on the Apollo program . He and his wife Carol adopted two children , Scott and Sally .

After taking a year off hockey in 1964 , Masterton regained his amateur status so that he could play

senior hockey in the United States Hockey League . He played two seasons with the St. Paul Steers between 1964 and 1966 . Masterton became a naturalized American citizen , allowing him to join the United States National Team in 1966 ? 67 . He served as captain on that team and was considered its most valuable player .

= = = Minnesota North Stars = = =

The NHL expanded in 1967 , doubling from 6 teams to 12 . Among the new entries was the Minnesota North Stars . The new team 's coach and general manager , Wren Blair , had scouted Masterton while he played with the US Nationals and purchased his NHL playing rights from the Canadiens . Masterton was the first player to sign with Minnesota , agreeing to a two @-@ year contract . He said prior to the start of the 1967 ? 68 season that being able to play in Minnesota was key as he would have been unlikely to consider an offer with any other team .

At the age of 29 , Masterton made his NHL debut in the North Stars ' inaugural game , played October 11 , 1967 , against the St. Louis Blues . In that game , a 2 ? 2 tie , Masterton scored the first goal in Minnesota franchise history . His wife Carol later recalled that it was a " dream come true " for her husband : " He always wanted a shot at the NHL , and expansion was a wonderful thing for him and guys like him . " By mid @-@ season , Masterton had scored 4 goals and 12 points in 38 games .

= = = Death = = =

Masterton suffered a severe internal brain injury during the first period of Minnesota 's January 13 , 1968 , game against the Oakland Seals at the Met Center . He carried the puck up the ice at full speed , passing it off as two Seals defenders , Larry Cahan and Ron Harris , converged on him . Masterton was knocked backward in the resulting collision and landed on his head . Like most players of his era , he wasn 't wearing a helmet . Referee Wally Harris compared the hit to an explosion , adding " he was checked hard , but I 'm sure it wasn 't a dirty play . " The force of the impact caused Masterton to bleed from his nose , ears and mouth . The impact of the hit caused him to lose consciousness before he hit the ice ; according to some accounts , he briefly came to and muttered , " Never again , never again " before passing back out . He received treatment on the ice and in the dressing room before being rushed to Fairview @-@ Southdale Hospital .

Carol , who was watching the game from the stands , and Masterton 's parents , who were listening to the game from their home in Winnipeg , rushed to his bed side at the hospital . He was attended to by two neurosurgeons and three other doctors . They soon concluded that the injury was too severe for surgery to be a viable option . Some 30 hours after his fall , on January 15 , Masterton died without ever regaining consciousness . His parents , brother , wife and two children were at his side . Masterton 's Minnesota teammates , who were playing a game in Boston on the 14th , were informed that he had been removed from life support in the dressing room in what was ultimately a 9 ? 2 loss to the Bruins . He is the only player in NHL history to die as a direct result of an injury suffered on the ice . To date , he is the last player to die as a direct result of an in @-@ game injury in one of the major North American professional sports .

Ron Harris was haunted for many years by his role in Masterton 's death : " It bothers you the rest of your life . It wasn 't dirty and it wasn 't meant to happen that way . Still , it 's very hard because I made the play . It 's always in the back of my mind . " But Masterton 's family held no animosity towards the players involved or the game . Carol referred to the incident as a fluke , saying that it could have happened to anyone .

= = Legacy = =

Few NHL players wore helmets in 1968 , and Masterton 's death sparked an immediate debate on whether their use should be compulsory . Legislators in New York considered a law to make their use mandatory , and the NHL voted on and rejected a rule requiring players wear helmets three

times by 1971 .

Some players began to wear helmets following Masterton 's death , but adoption was slow . Three years later , only six Minnesota players wore them , the most of any of the NHL 's teams . The " macho " attitude of the game , including fear of being called a coward , was an often cited reason for reluctance . It was 11 years before the NHL finally mandated the use of helmets by all players entering the league beginning in the 1979 ? 80 season .

A later analysis by the Toronto Star in 2011 suggested that the " macho " attitude of the NHL in that era , as well as his aggressive playing style , played a significant role in Masterton 's death . Coach Wren Blair believed that Masterton was playing despite a pre @-@ existing brain hemorrhage , and was concerned enough that he wanted to have Masterton checked out by a doctor . However , Masterton brushed it off . Longtime NHL coach John Muckler , who was then the coach of the Stars ' second @-@ tier farm team , the Memphis South Stars , believed that Masterton may have suffered a brain injury as early as training camp . During the season , several players and coaches recalled seeing Masterton black out during rushes in practice . Goaltender Cesare Maniago recalled that the night before the fatal hit , Masterton had been complaining of severe migraines that he 'd had for over a week . They felt it caused what was otherwise viewed as a routine , albeit hard , bodycheck to turn fatal . Toronto neurosurgeon and concussion expert Charles Tator reviewed Masterton 's autopsy and opined that Masterton had suffered second @-@ impact syndrome , which occurs when a person suffers a second concussion on top of an earlier , untreated concussion . When this happens , it can cause rapid and often fatal brain swelling .

Several awards were named in Masterton 's memory . The Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy was created in 1968 under the trusteeship of the Professional Hockey Writers ' Association and is presented annually to the " National Hockey League player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance , sportsmanship and dedication to hockey " . The University of Denver Pioneers hockey team named its most valuable player award after him , and his Winnipeg high school , Miles MacDonnell Collegiate , presents a scholarship in his name . High schools in Bloomington , where the North Stars played their games , also award scholarships in Masterton 's name . The Minnesota North Stars pulled his jersey number 19 out of circulation following his death and formally retired it in 1987 . That honour followed the franchise when it relocated south to become the Dallas Stars .

Masterton was inducted into the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame in 1985 , and named to the NCAA 's 50th anniversary team in 1997 .

= = Career statistics = =

= = Awards and honours = =