

= Calgary Hitmen =

The Calgary Hitmen are a major junior ice hockey team based in Calgary , Alberta , Canada . The Hitmen play in the Central Division of the Western Hockey League ( WHL ) . They play their home games at the Scotiabank Saddledome . Bret " The Hitman " Hart , a local @-@ born professional wrestler , was a founding owner as well as the inspiration for the team 's name . Established in 1994 , the team has been owned by the Calgary Flames hockey club since 1997 . They are the third WHL team to represent Calgary , preceded by the Centennials and Wranglers .

The Hitmen have finished with the best record in the WHL four times , and qualified for the playoffs for thirteen consecutive seasons between 1998 and 2010 . In 1999 , they became the first Calgary team to win the President 's Cup as league champions , and the first to represent the city in the Memorial Cup since the Calgary Canadians won the national junior title in 1926 . The Hitmen hold numerous WHL attendance records , and in 2004 ? 05 became the first team in Canadian Hockey League history to average 10 @,@ 000 fans per game . Thirty @-@ nine former Hitmen players have gone on to play in the National Hockey League .

= = Franchise history = =

Graham James left his position as coach and general manager of the Swift Current Broncos to found the Hitmen in 1994 . He organized a group of eighteen investors in the club , including star National Hockey League players Theoren Fleury and Joe Sakic , along with Bret Hart , famous for his exploits in the World Wrestling Federation . The Calgary Flames , who had just assumed control of the then Saddledome and were looking to fill extra dates in the building , were receptive to the new team .

Calgary had been without a WHL team since the Wranglers moved south to become the Lethbridge Hurricanes in 1987 . The league 's expansion into Calgary was met with skepticism , as the league had previously failed in Western Canada 's largest markets of Vancouver , Edmonton , Calgary , and Winnipeg , when in competition with the NHL .

The Stampede Corral has served as a second home for the odd home game when the Saddledome is unavailable . They used the Corral for regular season home games in 1995 @-@ 1996 and playoff games in 1998 and 2016 .

= = = Controversial beginnings = = =

The club selected its name and logo as an homage to Bret " The Hitman " Hart . The team 's distinctive pink , grey and black jerseys were also modeled after Hart 's ring attire . The logo proved immensely popular and Hitmen merchandise sold well at many local retailers . However , the name and logo were also subject to heavy criticism from segments of the public and the business community , who panned both as negative stereotypes of violence within the sport . Among the chief critics of the new logo was the Flames organization . They had received calls from concerned business people over theme and shared that sentiment . Struggling to attract corporate sponsors , the Hitmen chose to scrap the " Jason Voorhees " -style logo in favour of an alternate " starburst " logo just two months after it was unveiled . The club went back to the original logo in 1996 .

The Hitmen entered their first season playing in the newly formed Central Division , and were predicted to finish as high as third in the five @-@ team division . Instead , they finished as the second @-@ worst regular season team in the league , posting an 18 ? 51 ? 3 record . The Hitmen lost CAD \$ 250 @,@ 000 in their first season and saw their season ticket base halved to 700 for the 1996 ? 97 season . The losses led to questions about the viability of the club .

Citing personal reasons , James stunned the organization when he resigned as coach and general manager on September 5 , 1996 . Two days later , the Calgary Police Service revealed that James was being investigated on allegations he sexually abused two former players while he was with the Swift Current Broncos . James was charged , and in January 1997 pleaded guilty to two counts of sexual assault . Upon James ' conviction , and sentencing to 3 ½ years in prison , the Hitmen

attempted to distance themselves from their former coach . <

The Hitmen struggled on the ice as well , again missing the playoffs after falling to a record of 15 ? 53 ? 4 . The spectre of the Graham James scandal hurt the franchise . The original investors , many of whom played for or were otherwise associated with James , sold the team to the Flames for approximately \$ 1 @. @ 5 million in June 1997 . It was widely speculated that the new owners would change the team name , possibly to the Junior Flames , however they chose to retain the name although they adopted a new colour scheme and updated the logo .

= = = First championship = = =

Dean Clark took over as head coach shortly after James ' resignation , and led the 1997 ? 98 Hitmen to a remarkable turnaround . The team improved to a 40 ? 28 ? 4 record and first @-@ place finish in the Central Division , qualifying for the playoffs for the first time in franchise history . They defeated the Saskatoon Blades and Swift Current Broncos to reach the Eastern Conference final before falling to the Brandon Wheat Kings . Clark was awarded the Dunc McCallum Memorial Trophy as the WHL 's top coach , and also won the Canadian Hockey League 's Brian Kilrea Coach of the Year Award . Calgary improved to 51 ? 13 ? 8 in 1998 ? 99 , finishing one point ahead of the Kamloops Blazers for the regular season title . Led by Brad Moran , Pavel Brendl and goaltender Alexandre Fomitchev , the Hitmen lost just five games in the playoffs en route to their first league championship . They won the title at home before a WHL playoff record crowd of 17 @, @ 139 . They became the first Calgary @-@ based team to qualify for the Memorial Cup since the Calgary Canadians won the 1926 title .

In the 1999 Memorial Cup , the Hitmen opened their tournament with a 5 ? 3 victory over the Ontario Hockey League 's Belleville Bulls , followed by a 4 ? 3 loss to the host Ottawa 67 's . They followed with a 3 ? 1 win over the Acadie @-@ Bathurst Titan of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League . Finishing atop the round robin standings , the Hitmen earned a bye into the championship game , and a rematch against the 67 's . The championship game was a back @-@ and @-@ forth affair . Ottawa held 4 ? 1 and 6 ? 5 leads , while Calgary led 5 ? 4 at one point and tied the game late to send it to overtime . The Hitmen fell short of winning the title however , as Ottawa 's Matt Zultek scored the winning goal 1 : 58 into overtime . Brendl and Matt Kinch were named to the Memorial Cup All @-@ Star team .

The Hitmen entered the 1999 ? 2000 season with a strong squad , along with expectations at making another run to the Memorial Cup . The club finished the regular season with a record of 58 ? 12 ? 2 ? 2 , once again winning the regular season title . The team set franchise records for victories ( 58 ) and points ( 120 ) , which stood until the 2008 ? 09 year . After sweeping the Moose Jaw Warriors and Saskatoon Blades , the Hitmen were upset by the Kootenay Ice in the Eastern Conference final , falling four games to one .

= = = 2000s = = =

The Hitmen went through a rebuilding period and finished third or fourth in the Central Division between 2001 and 2004 , winning only one playoff series during that time . The Hitmen acquired goaltender Justin Pogge from the Prince George Cougars during the 2004 ? 05 season . Pogge 's goaltending , along with the offensive leadership of forward Andrew Ladd , saw the Hitmen win their first playoff series in four years . They could not follow up on their victory over the Lethbridge Hurricanes , however , losing their second round series against the Brandon Wheat Kings in seven games .

The Hitmen were heavily marketed by the Flames during the National Hockey League 's 2004 ? 05 lockout . As a result , the Hitmen averaged 10 @, @ 062 fans per game and set a new league attendance record . The season total of 362 @, @ 227 fans smashed the old record by over 45 @, @ 000 . The Hitmen became the first Canadian Hockey League team to average over 10 @, @ 000 fans per game , having the highest average attendance of any hockey team ? junior or professional ? in North America that year .

The 2005 ? 06 Hitmen battled the Medicine Hat Tigers for the top spot in the Western Hockey League for most of the season . Calgary finished with 101 points , their best total since 1999 ? 2000 , however , finishing two points behind Medicine Hat for the best record in the league . The team again disappointed in the playoffs , falling to the Moose Jaw Warriors in the Eastern Conference semi @-@ final . Pogge 's performance during the season earned him honours as both the WHL player of the year and CHL goaltender of the year . Calgary fell to third in the Central Division in 2006 ? 07 . In the playoffs , they upset the Kootenay Ice , who finished 19 @-@ points ahead of Calgary in the regular season . The Hitmen then defeated the East Division champion Brandon Wheat Kings to reach the Eastern Conference final for the fourth time in franchise history , where they were subsequently defeated by the Tigers .

The Hitmen entered the 2007 ? 08 season with expectations of being strong contenders , voted the pre @-@ season pick to finish atop the Eastern Conference by the league 's coaches and general managers . The team lived up to expectations , winning the Central Division , and finishing with the best record in the East for the first time since 2000 . During a late season game , Calgary broke the league 's single @-@ game attendance record , as an announced crowd of 19 @,@ 305 watched Calgary defeat Kootenay by a score of 6 goals to 1 . In the playoffs , the Hitmen defeated the Moose Jaw Warriors and Swift Current Broncos in six games apiece , advancing to the Eastern Conference finals for the second consecutive season .

= = = Second championship = = =

Following the graduation of several players , including Karl Alzner , who was named both WHL player of the year and CHL defenceman of the year , the 2008 ? 09 Hitmen were expected to enter a rebuilding period . Instead , they captured the franchise 's third Scotty Munro Memorial Trophy as the regular season champion , earning the top seed in the playoffs . The team tied or broke 21 franchise records during the regular season , including wins ( 59 ) , points ( 122 ) and goals for ( 334 ) . Joel Broda led the league with 53 goals , while Brandon Kozun and Brett Sonne finished second and third in league scoring with 108 and 100 points respectively ; it was only the second time in franchise history that two players topped the 100 @-@ point mark in the same season . In the playoffs , the Hitmen won 12 straight games , sweeping the Edmonton Oil Kings , Lethbridge Hurricanes and Brandon Wheat Kings to reach the WHL finals for the first time since 1999 . In the finals , they were stunned by the Kelowna Rockets , losing the first three games of the series before winning the next two to extend the series to a sixth game . The Hitmen lost game six in overtime , and the series 4 ? 2 , to end their season . Sonne was named WHL Player of the Year , while General Manager Kelly Kisio was named Executive of the Year for the second time in recognition of the Hitmen 's season .

Calgary again finished with the best record in the regular season with 107 points on the strength of Kozun 's CHL leading 107 points and the goaltending of Martin Jones , who was named goaltender of the year in the WHL . The Hitmen 's playoffs nearly ended quickly as they lost three of the first four games in their opening round playoff series against the Warriors before winning three consecutive games to take the series in seven . They then beat the Tigers and Wheat Kings in six and five games respectively to reach the WHL championship series for the second consecutive year . Entering the final against the Tri @-@ City Americans , the 11 players who returned from the 2009 finals lost vowed not to suffer a repeat of their disappointing finish to the previous season . Named the playoff MVP , Jones allowed only seven goals against in the final as the Hitmen defeated the Americans in five games to win their second Ed Chynoweth Cup in franchise history . The victory , in front of a home crowd of over 15 @,@ 000 fans , earned the Hitmen a berth in the 2010 Memorial Cup tournament . At the tournament , Calgary posted a 2 ? 1 record in the round robin , defeating the QMJHL 's Moncton Wildcats and the host Brandon Wheat Kings , but lost the semi @-@ final in overtime , also against Brandon .

Following the graduation of many of the team 's top scorers , the Hitmen fell to last place the WHL in 2010 ? 11 , at one point tying a franchise record with 12 consecutive losses . As part of the 2011 Heritage Classic , the Hitmen hosted the Regina Pats in an outdoor game at McMahon Stadium on

February 21 , 2011 . Regina won 3 ? 2 before 20 @,@ 888 fans , setting new WHL and CHL attendance records , and proving the highest attended junior game of all @-@ time .

= = Community impact = =

The Hitmen are active within the community , supporting numerous programs and charities . They host an annual teddy bear toss each December . The 13th annual Petro Canada Teddy Bear Toss , held on December 2 , 2007 , saw what the Hitmen claim to be a world record 26 @,@ 919 bears tossed on to the ice by 17 @,@ 341 fans . The bears are donated to charities throughout the Calgary area . A few of the bears are personally delivered by the players to the Alberta Children 's Hospital , an event highly anticipated by patients attending the hospital .

The Hitmen are also partners with the Calgary Board of Education and their Read On ! Literacy for Life program . Author Sigmund Brouwer has released numerous young adult @-@ oriented mystery novels about the team and fictitious Hitmen players . The ninth book in the series , titled Hitmen Star , was published in 2008 . Copies of the books are distributed to sixth grade students throughout Calgary and southern Alberta schools ; with Hitmen and former National Hockey League players helping to encourage students to take an active interest in reading .

= = Current roster = =

Updated Feb @-@ 2 @-@ 16

= = Season @-@ by @-@ season record = =