

= The French Connection ( ice hockey ) =

The French Connection was a line of professional ice hockey forwards who played together for the Buffalo Sabres of the National Hockey League from 1972 until 1979 . The line consisted of Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault at centre and All @-@ Stars Rick Martin and Rene Robert at left wing and right wing , respectively . All three players were French @-@ Canadian ; Perreault is from Victoriaville , Quebec , Martin was from Verdun , Quebec , and Robert is from Trois @-@ Rivières , Quebec . The name was related both to the origins of the players and the 1971 hit movie entitled The French Connection , based upon the book of the same name .

The trio excelled together , with each being named to the Official NHL All @-@ Star Team at least once and to the National Hockey League All @-@ Star Game at least twice while playing together as a unit for seven full seasons . Perreault and Martin were the Buffalo Sabres ' first @-@ round draft picks in the franchise 's first two years , and Robert was acquired late in the franchise 's second season via a spring 1972 trade . The players were named to several National Hockey League All @-@ Star Game teams and dominated the Buffalo scoring statistical leadership during their years together . They led the Sabres to the franchise 's first Stanley Cup Finals appearance and continue to hold many of the franchise 's scoring records .

= = History = =

Perreault was acquired by the team with their first draft pick of their inaugural season in the 1970 Entry Draft . Martin followed the next year as the team 's first pick in 1971 . Both players were drafted after three seasons with the Montreal Junior Canadiens . Robert was acquired in a trade on March 4 , 1972 , for Eddie Shack . He played twelve games for the Sabres during the 1971 ? 72 NHL season . Perreault played his entire 17 @-@ season career with the Sabres . Martin played all but 4 games of his injury @-@ shortened 11 @-@ season career with the Sabres . The trio played together as a line most of the time until the fall of 1979 . On October 5 , 1979 , Scotty Bowman traded Robert to the Colorado Rockies for defenseman John Van Boxmeer . This ended the French Connection era in Buffalo , but not before the trio became the first three players to accumulate 200 goals in a Sabres uniform . Each player 's jerseys were retired ; Perreault 's # 11 was retired during a ceremony on October 17 , 1990 , and Robert 's # 14 and Martin 's # 7 were retired on November 15 , 1995 . All three numbers hang together from the First Niagara Center under a French Connection banner .

In hopes of averting the lean years that troubled most expansion teams , George Imlach , the Sabres first coach and General Manager , attempted to build a high @-@ scoring club to excite the local hockey fans . Perreault was regarded as a smooth skater and tremendous stickhandler . Perreault was chosen to be the franchise player around which a team could be built and succeed . Although Martin and Perreault had played two years together with the Montreal Junior Canadiens ( Perreault even lived with Martin 's family during the 1969 ? 70 season ) , they had never played on the same line before being paired in Buffalo . Since Martin was one of the few who could keep up with Perreault as a skater they were paired together after the Sabres drafted Martin . It was very clear during the 1971 ? 72 season that Perreault and Martin were a natural pairing . Sabres coach Joe Crozier felt the two just needed a third player who would stay high and check . Sabres coach quickly teamed Robert with Perreault and Martin after the trade . The two players complemented Perreault and became a dynamic combination that dazzled fans . They were dubbed the French Connection by writer Lee Coppola as a reference to the Academy Award @-@ winning film and their heritage via the Buffalo Auditorium message board . The pair played together as a regular line through the 1974 ? 75 season . At times , they were split up during the last four seasons . When they played together they often faced the opposition 's top defensive lineups . Since the trio were tremendous skating scoring threats these opponents would concentrate on checking them and staying on top of them . For example , against the Montreal Canadiens Bob Gainey 's line would oppose them . Rick Martin once said about this line " I had Jimmy Roberts between me and my shadow . "

Perreault was known as a naturally gifted skater and playmaker who was capable of making an end @-@ to @-@ end rush at any time . His fame was hampered by his own shy personality . His stickhandling and head faking confounded even the best defensive players in the world . Martin was considered the " marksman " of the three who was dangerous with the wristshot and slapshot . Robert was known for his " blinding speed and lethal shot " . He made his mark with the French Connection , as one of the league 's most highly regarded powerplay point men , and on the second line penalty killing unit . He was perhaps the least flashy of the three , but was the most complete . He was the player who checked and worked hard in the corners .

Perreault holds numerous club career records ( including regular season games played , goals , assists , points , game @-@ winning goals , 30 @-@ goal seasons , 20 @-@ goal seasons , and shots on goal ) . However , Martin holds the franchise career records for hat tricks , four @-@ goal games , 40 @-@ goal seasons , consecutive 40 @-@ goal seasons , 50 @-@ goal seasons ( tied with Danny Gare ) and consecutive 50 @-@ goal seasons . Although Robert 's name is not as prominent in the record books. his 40 @-@ goal and 60 @-@ assist 1974 ? 75 NHL season was the club 's first 100 @-@ point season by an individual . During the seven full seasons the trio was together , Perreault led the Sabres in scoring five times and Robert and Martin led the team once each . Martin led the team three times in goals , Perreault twice and Robert once during this time . Perreault led the team in assists four times and Robert did so twice . In addition , the two tied once for the lead in assists . Martin 's 1975 ? 76 season with 7 hat tricks continues to be tied with Alexander Mogilny for the franchise single @-@ season record . Martin and Perreault continue to be first and second for rookie season points and goals in franchise history ( records set before the arrival of Robert ) .

The trio led the Sabres to the Stanley Cup playoffs every full season they were together , except the 1973 ? 74 NHL season when Perreault suffered a broken leg and only played in 55 games . The impact of the combination was obvious as the team began the first full season of the French Connection era with a ten @-@ game unbeaten streak ; the team made the playoffs for the first time in the history of the franchise and the three members of the French Connection were the teams three leading scorers . The team suddenly went unbeaten in their first 21 home games , while setting a record for post 1967 expansion teams by recording a home winning streak of 12 and while going unbeaten in New York state for 25 games including 1 win at the Nassau Coliseum and 3 at the Madison Square Garden . Their first playoff appearance during their first full season together ( 1972 ? 3 ) was not only the franchise 's first playoff appearance , but the series also marked history as the only National Hockey League Playoff series with brothers ( Ken Dryden and Dave Dryden ) as opposing goaltenders . In the first game of the series , both goaltenders were chosen as being among the three stars of the game . During the 1974 ? 75 NHL season , all members of the trio were selected to play in the National Hockey League All @-@ Star game ; they all finished among the top ten in league scoring , and they led the team to a tie for first place in the regular season standings .

Among their postseason highlights was the May 20 , 1975 , game three of the 1975 Stanley Cup Finals . This game , known as the fog game , was memorable because Buffalo Memorial Auditorium had no air conditioning and the arena temperature matched the 90 degree outdoor temperature , which caused fog to shroud the ice surface . During the overtime , play was delayed seven times due to fog on the ice surface at the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium . The players were instructed by Flyer coach Fred Shero and Sabre coach Floyd Smith to shoot whenever possible because of the impaired goaltender vision . Eventually , the French connection combined to score a Martin to Perreault to Robert game @-@ winning goal . This came after the French Connection swarmed Flyer goalie enabling Bill Hajt to knock in a Rick Martin rebound to send the game to overtime .

The 1975 ? 76 season would also be memorable for the trio and the franchise . On January 4 , 1976 , the Sabres hosted part of the two @-@ team eight @-@ game NHL tour by the opposing the Soviet Wings . The Sabres handed the Russians the first of only two defeats on the tour . The French Connection contributed 4 goals and 5 assists to a 12 @-@ 6 victory . The night marked the worst defeat by a Russian hockey team in international competition .

The trio was , and remains , immensely popular in Buffalo , New York , as well as the surrounding

Western New York area , and their international popularity and cultural prominence was also evident . They never won a Stanley Cup , but are an important part of hockey history . Rick Martin was the 1977 National Hockey League All @-@ Star Game most valuable player and Perreault scored the game @-@ winning overtime goal in the 1978 NHL All @-@ Star Game at the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium . Perreault was selected to play in nine All @-@ Star games ( 1970 ? 71 , 1971 ? 72 , 1973 ? 74 , 1974 ? 75 , 1976 ? 77 , 1977 ? 78 , 1978 ? 79 , 1979 ? 80 , 1983 ? 84 ) , Martin was selected to play in seven consecutive All @-@ Star games ( 1971 ? 72 through 1977 ? 78 ) and Robert was selected to two All @-@ Star games ( 1972 ? 73 , 1974 ? 75 ) . In addition , Martin was selected as the Official NHL All @-@ Star First Team Left Wing in 1973 ? 74 & 1974 ? 75 and the Official NHL All @-@ Star Second Team Left Wing in 1975 ? 76 & 1976 ? 77 . Perreault was selected as the Official NHL All @-@ Star Second Team Center in 1975 ? 76 & 1976 ? 77 . Rene Robert was selected as the Official NHL All @-@ Star Second Team Right Wing in 1974 ? 75 . Perreault earned the Calder Trophy in 1971 and the Lady Byng Trophy in 1973 . All honours for all players were as Buffalo Sabres . All Official NHL All @-@ Star Team selections were earned while the three were teammates . Perreault was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1990 .

The line made occasional appearances as members of the Buffalo Sabres Alumni Hockey Team until Martin 's death in March 2011 . Their last appearance together was to introduce Terrence Pegula as the Sabres ' owner on February 24 , 2011 .

= = The French Connection years = =

= = = Regular season = = =

= = = Playoffs = = =