

# Great-grandsons of Ben Comeault will carry his competitive spirit to the NHL

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

When Rene Comeault took to the ice as a hockey player, his mother was always worried. Worried her son would be injured on the ice. When Gisele Comeault's husband took to the ice, she still worried, but for different reasons.

"She was afraid to go to his games because she was afraid he would hurt somebody," Rene said.

"That's was the kind of tensy he had as a player."

The family of Ben Comeault was universal in saying their father would have been thrilled to see two of his great-grandsons drafted to the NHL. Owen Pickering and Denton Mateychuk aren't just going to be late-round picks, as the cousins are projected to go in the first round of the draft July 7.

Many family members, including Rene, will be making the trip to Montreal to watch their nephews begin their professional hockey journey.

"He'd be so over-the-moon excited," Ben's daughter, Denise Pohl, said.

"I'm so sad he's not here for this moment in time to see this. He would be just so damned proud."

Ben Comeault was born on Christmas Eve in 1923, and died in 2017. He served in the military during the Second World War and was a fiercely competitive person who loved hockey. He had five daughters and two sons.

"He was very strict, and he instilled such a good work ethic in all of us," Pohl said, fondly remembering weekly family trips to go water skiing in St. Malo.

"He worked hard, and he expected that from the rest of us too... He was a strict dad, but a good dad."

The Carillon covered Ben's hockey exploits over the years, profiling the defenseman in a 1957 article.

In the 1954/1955 season, Ben played for three teams in three different leagues, battling hard throughout the Eastman region for teams in Dominion City, Letellier, and even Killarney, oftentimes playing six games in a week.



Ben Comeault would be proud his two great-grandsons would be drafted to the NHL. The Dominion City hockey player represented teams from Emerson, St. Jean, Letellier, Killarney, St. Pierre and Dominion City over the years.

Playing for Killarney as a defenseman in the 50s he averaged a goal a game, despite driving over 350 miles for each game, returning home to Dominion City at four or five in the morning to run the Texaco Bulk Station.

He also spent a few years playing for Hallock, Minnesota in the States Dominion league, receiving all-star honours in the 1947/1948 season.

Ben's proudest moment on the ice came in 1952, when the Letellier team he was playing on won the Manitoba Senior Championship, moving on to compete in the Allan Cup playdowns.

Letellier would eventually lose to eventual champions Fort Frances in a seven-game series.

Rene, who played for the University of Maine in the NCAA, said Ben would often travel to attend his games, but he didn't get a chance to see his dad suit up in a competitive environment. That didn't stop him from bringing everything he had to annual Christmas old-timers games.

"(Ben) was well into his age, and hadn't played for years, but you could just see the competitive spirit in him," Rene said, remembering his



The 1949/1950 Letellier Maple Leafs, including Ben Comeault. The team would win the Southern Manitoba Senior hockey title and Bob Divens trophy, defeating the Winnipeg Maroons in seven games in 1951/1952.

dad on the ice.

"There is no question that when he played... he was an extremely competitive player who performed well."

That competitive drive extended to playing ball in the summer too. The Comeault family would often gather to play in ball tournaments, and when the 'Bengees' (a combination of Ben and Gisele's first names) took to the field, they often won. That didn't stop Ben from keeping track of who made mistakes on the field.

"Whenever somebody made an error, do you think he'd forget that?" daughter Carol Gushuliak remembers, laughing.

"Five years down the road he'd say 'do you remember when you dropped the ball out in left field?' That was so funny. He's always really loved sports... we loved sports because of him."

The Comeault family also boasts strong ball players. Maddox Mateychuk, Denton's brother, plays baseball for a university in Kentucky.

"(Ben) always would watch the Toronto Blue Jays and all the baseball games, and he'd always say 'I hope I can stay alive to watch that guy pitch on here,' and he'd point to the TV," Gushuliak said.

Ben and Rene were both huge

Montreal Canadians fans, meaning the draft taking place in Montreal a perfect fit.

"Everybody has their favourite teams, but that is all going to be put on the back burner if all of a sudden one of our nephews is drafted to the Boston Bruins, a team I absolutely despise," Rene said.

"It's gonna make me reconsider the whole thing."

While Pickering stands at a towering 6'4, seven inches taller than his great-grandfather while he played, Denton's smaller size and offensive ability has the family seeing double, and celebrating when they saw a video of the young defenseman throwing a perfect hip-check while playing for the Moose Jaw Warriors in the WHL.

"Mom used to always say that he would defend with his butt," Gushuliak said.

"I can just visualize it. I've seen Denton play that way. That's how he defends, and I think 'oh my gosh, that must have been what dad did.'"

Denton and Owen will learn which teams they'll start their professional careers on at the NHL draft July 7. No matter where they end up, they'll have a fan base rooting for them to carry on their great-grandfather's passion and competitive spirit.

## Dulder named to volleyball hall of fame

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

It took until Don Dulder was asked to put together a profile for his induction to the Volleyball Manitoba Hall of Fame for the current Canadian Menno-nite University (CMU) coach to realize he was a deserving candidate.

"You look back at it and think, 'holy mackerel, did I do all that?'" he said.

Needless to say, Dulder's volleyball coaching resume is strong.

Starting as a teacher at Niverville Collegiate in the 70s, Dulder helped lead the school to countless volleyball banners, including becoming the only AA school team to move up to the AAAA level in Manitoba high school sports for eight years in a row.

"I was totally floored," he said of receiving the hall of fame honour.

"You don't coach and do this to get inducted in a hall of fame, I just do it because I love it."

Those Niverville Collegiate teams didn't just fill a space at the AAAA table, making the final four in Manitoba twice across those eight years.

"We did some amazing things in Niverville, and I think only the volleyball community recognized that," Dulder said.

"Our level was so high, we could have gone AA, and won a slew of AA championships, but I said to (the parents and kids) 'do you want to find out how good you are? Do you want to play against the best? Then lets go AAAA.'"

He also served as the Manitoba High School Athletic Association Zone 13 athletic council president for 25 years.

In club play, Dulder boasts medals at the national level, including a 2013 gold medal performance from his Winman

18U team. That team was named as Volleyball Manitoba's "team of the year," and Dulder was selected as the coach of the year.

In 2014, Dulder began coaching at CMU, helping take the team to the next level. The Blazers have since won their first Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC) volleyball championship and added three more, including back-to-back championships in 2020 and 2022. (The 2021 season was cancelled due to COVID-19.)

In 2022, CMU became the first team to represent MCAC at the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association national championships in Quebec City.

Blazers players have the option of transferring credits if they manage to climb the collegiate ladder, so Dulder hopes having a "hall of fame," coach will convince players the path to the next level might run through CMU.

"I don't know how much longer I'm going to do this, I'm not a spring chicken anymore," the 71-year-old said.

Dulder added many players in MCAC may have the skill to play at a higher level, but lack the height to make a USports roster. At the championships in Quebec, the Blazers went up against the highly ranked Humber Hawks which boasted a 6'10 middle player, and a 6'5 "dude who could jump to the moon." A tough task for a squad which only boasted a 6'3 middle.

Dulder said volleyball at the MCAC level can be a little underrated, as the Blazers have played exhibition matches against the University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg and held their own.

"Naturally they beat us, but I tell you, we've taken sets off them, and we



Don Dulder was inducted into the Volleyball Manitoba hall of fame as part of the class of 2022 as a builder. The coach spent nearly 40 years at Niverville Collegiate, leading them to AAAA status in high school sports. The 71-year-old now coaches the CMU Blazers.

are very, very competitive with them," Dulder said.

While Dulder's accomplishments as a high school and club coach make up most of his coaching career, he's found the process of recruiting and building a collegiate program at CMU fulfilling, especially considering the

"Now, I wish I wasn't 71, I wish I was 51, because I just love this," Dulder said.

"This is what I've always wanted to do."

Dulder was officially inducted during the 2022 Volleyball Manitoba Awards and Hall of Fame Banquet held June 12. Alongside Dulder in the class of 2022 was Megan Cyr and Justin Duff, who both played for team Canada across vast playing careers.

## Rolling to nationals

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

Bowlers from Steinbach will be pulling on Team Manitoba jerseys once again later this summer, as they hit the lanes in Kamloops for the Canada 55+ Games.

The Manitoba 55+ Games were hosted in Selkirk from June 7-9 in 2022. The team, which will be the only one representing the province in bowling at the upcoming games, will be entered in the 65+ age category, despite having even older members.

The team's captain is Mike Baziuk, who will also be competing in singles in the 85+ division at the games in Kamloops.

Others on the team include Doug Graham, Taras Chubey, Shirley Chubey and Bruce Taggart. Graham, Taras and Shirley will also be bowling in the 65+ singles category.

The Eastman team stepped up to represent the province after the top two qualifying teams decided not to make the trip to B.C.

"We didn't qualify gold or silver, but both gold and silver did not want to go," Baziuk said.

"So we went as a representative that way."

Bowling teams measure their score by pins over average, while single bowlers will measure total pins at this year's games. Each team will bowl three times a day over the course of the event for three days, for a total of nine games of 5-pin bowling.

"Our average is 798 as a team," Baziuk said.

"So if we go over 798, then we're a plus."

The last time Eastman bowlers competed at the 55+ games was 2016 in Brampton. All three age divisions were represented by area bowlers that year, and they all came back with gold medals. They also came back with an individual medal.

"It's going to be tough to make the medals in Kamloops because it's scratch," Baziuk said.

"There will be masters bowlers there with over 200 average, so it's really tough. In the team sport, because it's pins over average, everyone has a lot closer to an equal chance."

The games were postponed from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Normally the Canada 55+ Games are held every two years.

"It's like the Olympics for seniors," Baziuk said, laughing. "Because we're old, we don't want to wait four years, so we have it every two years."

It is the first time the Canada 55+ Games have been hosted in B.C.

The Manitoba golf qualifiers have yet to be played, due to poor course conditions in Selkirk. They have been rescheduled for early August.



The Eastman team which will be representing Manitoba at the Canada Senior 55+ games includes Mike Baziuk, Doug Graham, Taras Chubey, Shirley Chubey and Bruce Taggart.



## Potential top NHL pick hits the ball diamond

Denton Mateychuk of the visiting Altona Bisons takes a secondary lead on first base during an MJBL game at A.D. Penner Park. Mateychuk is projected to be drafted in the first round of the NHL entry draft July 7. Fans who wanted to get a glimpse of Mateychuk's effectiveness on the ball diamond were disappointed on July 3, as the Moose Jaw Warrior defenseman was thrown out of the second game of a doubleheader by the first base umpire after getting picked off by a Carillon Sultans pitcher.

CASSIDY DANKOCHIK THE CARILLON