

# TRY TO BEAT THAT!: THE 1978-79 BRANDON WHEAT KINGS

## Quebec media is way off base

BY GREGG DRINNAN

This story originally appeared in the May 10, 1979 edition of the Brandon Sun.

MONTREAL — It's sickening.

The media in Quebec can't see past the ends of their collective noses.

Despite the fact that Peterborough Petes and Brandon Wheat Kings played a clean, exciting hockey game in Sherbrooke on Tuesday night, the newspapers here continued to beat to death Monday's pre-game brawl between the Wheaties and Trois-Rivières Draveurs.

Actually, they are not beating the brawl to death. They are beating the Wheat Kings to death.

Here's a sampling of what Montreal's two English language dailies had to say on Wednesday.

Herb Zurkowsky, in the Gazette, wrote: "We here in Quebec are used to violence around junior hockey.

"We may not applaud it, but we've grown accustomed to incessant fighting and illegal stickwork.

"But the Westerners brought a new meaning to the term 'goon' hockey.

"In a rather cheap attempt at intimidation, the Wheat Kings started a full-scale brawl during the pre-game skate 30 minutes before game time."

There was more, but it would only make you ill.

Then, there was Fred Roberts, who did not even attend the game, writing in the Star:

"According to witnesses, Brian Propp of the Kings skated just over the red line and took a stick swing at Jean-Francois Sauve. They are considered two of the best juniors in Canada today.

"Mario Tardif, who was involved that stick-swinging incident with Jimmy Mann of Sherbrooke a year ago that led to a court case, then broke his stick swinging at a Brandon player. The battle was soon enjoined by all players and the call went out to police."

Nowhere, in either paper, was there mention of the first Draveur player coming on the ice for the pre-game warm-up and striking Brandon goaltender Rick Knuckle in the face mask with his stick.

Nowhere, in either paper, was there mention of the part played by Trois-Rivieres tough guy Daniel St. Laurent, a 12-goal scorer in the regular season who picked up 249 minutes in penalties in just 45 games. He was quoted in the French language dailies on Tuesday as saying: "If I had it



Brandon goalie Rick Knuckle was slashed in the mask during pre-game warm-up. When a brawl erupted, Quebec sports writers blamed the incident on the Wheat Kings and their "goon hockey." (Brandon Sun file photo)

to do all over again, I'd do it the same way."

Nowhere, in either paper, was there mention of Draveurs' Jean-Pierre Petit, who saw one shift in Sunday's opener against Peterborough and played so well that coach Michel Bergeron put him in the starting line-up Monday night. As soon as the first puck was dropped, Petit jumped Brandon's Brad Kempthorne. Petit, by the way, is a regular superstar. In 61 regular-season games, he had 160 minutes in penalties while scoring once and adding two assists.

There was also no mention of Draveurs' Danny Girard, who apparently did not play with them in the regular season or playoffs. He got two shifts Monday night and, on the second one, he jumped Brandon's Dave Chartier from behind. Girard earned a game misconduct and a \$100 fine for his efforts, but nothing was said in the papers about his actions.

I'm not saying that one team was guilty and the other was not, because it still takes two to tango.

But, in this country of Quebec, Westerners are pre-judged before they even get off their airplane. Talk about being found guilty before the trial.

The disappointing part of all this is that I understand Wheat Kings got the same kind of treatment from a Winnipeg daily. But, at least the Free Press has someone here covering the Memorial Cup.

Not all the writers here would lose a battle of wits, though. Jacques Archeault of Que-

bec City's Le Soleil could only hang his head in disgust after seeing the other French papers on Tuesday. "They didn't watch the same game and brawl that I saw," he said.

And the media from Peterborough was simply flabbergasted. They realized, though, that it could quite easily have been the Petes getting all the heat.

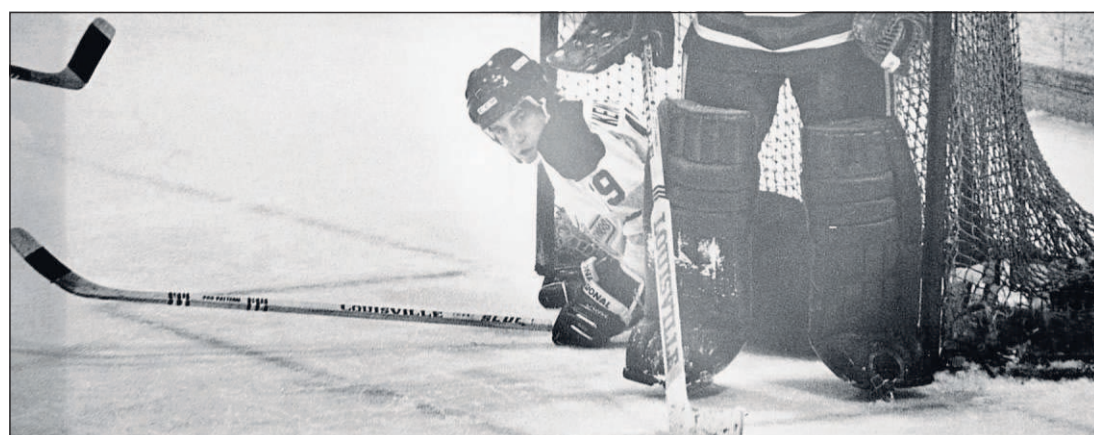
The word here is that the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League is the worst 'stick' circuit in the country. Apparently, three-hour games are the rule and not the exception. And after watching the Draveurs in action — one of them could do a better heart transplant than Dr. Christian Barnard — I don't doubt it one bit.

Most people have watched our professionals play the Soviets with a Soviet referee running the show and felt the frustrations of the players. Well, it's the same thing here whenever the Petes or Wheat Kings go up against the Draveurs.

The Draveurs, though, are not the best team. Brandon coach Dunc McCallum, for one, thinks they are the worst. In fact, in most people's opinion, Draveurs are the best with their sticks, but the worst when it comes to playing the game.

After Monday's altercation, which was not nearly as bad as the brawl the Wheat Kings and Saskatoon Blades engaged in Brandon late in the season, I was firmly convinced both teams were at fault. Obviously, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association agreed, because it fined each club \$1,000.

Unfortunately, the CAHA is



Brandon forward Brad Kempthorne, shown in a file photo, was jumped by Jean-Pierre Petit of the Trois-Rivières Draveurs in the first game of the Memorial Cup. (Brandon Sun file photo)

### ON THE ICE

#### MEMORIAL CUP

##### Trois-Rivieries Draveurs 4, Brandon 1 Game 1, May 7, 1979

**Recap:** The hosts outshot Brandon 13-4 in the first period and 12-9 in the middle frame as they took a 3-0 lead. Laurie Boschman scored Brandon's only goal with 43 seconds remaining as just about everything went wrong for the Wheat Kings in a fight-filled affair in which they were held to only 19 shots. The game took nearly three-and-a-half hours to complete due to the shenanigans.

**BWK goals:** Boschman.

**BWK goalie:** Knuckle.

**Shots on net:** 31-19 T-R.

**Attendance:** 3,105, in Trois-Rivieries.

**Record:** 0-1-0.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We were standing around a lot. Draveurs are a good skating hockey club and we had too many dead spots. We were standing around and against a club like that you've got to be skating. But we'll play better ... I'm sure of that."

##### Peterborough Petes 7, Brandon 6 (OT) Game 2, May 8, 1979

**Recap:** The Petes scored twice in the third period to send the game to overtime and then Jim Wiemer sniped two minutes 31 seconds into extra time as the Wheat Kings lost back-to-back games for the first time in 101 outings. The Petes had taken a 2-0 lead in the first period only to have the Wheat Kings tie it 2-2, but Peterborough responded with a pair of goals in the final minute of the opening frame to go up 4-2. Brandon scored four times in the middle frame to take a 6-4 lead but was unable to hold the Petes at bay and they tied it in the third period. The loss overshadowed Brandon's tremendous middle frame when it scored four times. The Wheat Kings, having lost back-to-back games for the first time this season, now had to win both their final round-robin games to reach the final.

**BWK goals:** Allison (2) Patrick, Propp, Kempthorne, Stewart.

**BWK goalie:** Knuckle.

**Shots on net:** 38-24 Pet.

**Attendance:** 2,387, in Sherbrooke.

**Record:** 0-2-0.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We really came on in that period. We've only played one period that way we're capable of playing and that was tonight's second period."

##### Brandon 6, Trois-Rivieries 1 Game 3, May 10, 1979

**Recap:** Laurie Boschman scored goals 15 seconds apart five minutes into the first period for all the offence Brandon would need as they built a 4-0 lead. Portland Winterhawks goalie Bart Hunter, who was added by Brandon after the WHL final, made his first start, turning aside 30 shots. Brandon's top line combined for nine points.

**BWK goals:** Boschman (2), Propp, Stewart, Allison, Gusdal.

**BWK goalie:** Hunter.

**Shots on net:** 45-31 BWK.

**Attendance:** 2,300, in Trois-Rivieries.

**Record:** 1-2-0.

**Dunc McCallum:** "Bart played well against us and he's a fiery guy. I thought the guys needed a spark. We've been giving up goals that should have been stopped ... about two a game. I thought Hunter gave our guys confidence out there."

##### Brandon 3, Peterborough 2 Game 4, May 11, 1979

**Recap:** Ray Allison scored his second goal of the game 24 seconds into the second period to tie it 2-2 and Brian Propp sniped midway through the third period for his team's first lead after the Wheat Kings rebounded from 1-0 and 2-1 deficits. Brad McCrimmon and Propp each had a pair of assists. Bart Hunter made 34 saves as the Wheat Kings hung on to earn a spot in the final on goal differential. Brandon was +2, Peterborough was even and Trois-Rivieries was -2.

**BWK goals:** Allison (2), Propp.

**BWK goalie:** Hunter.

**Shots on net:** 36-25 Pet.

**Attendance:** 1,680, in Verdun.

**Record:** 2-2-0.

**Dunc McCallum:** "I planned on playing (Hunter) because of the way he played against us in the Western final. He's a yeller and gets players up."

not able to levy a fine against the fans of Trois-Rivières. And the fans were definitely a contributing factor. It didn't take long once the home fans noticed some English-

speaking Brandonites in the

crowd for the French people to show their hostilities. Most of their actions were simply beyond words.

Later, I was informed that the Trois-Rivières area is the second-worst anti-English

part of this country. I didn't ask which part was the worst because I can't imagine anything being worse than what I witnessed on Monday night.

The worst part, though, could well be the media here.

## Wilder Jr. looks to build off solid Elks debut

BY DAN RALPH

It certainly hasn't taken James Wilder Jr. long to scrape the rust off his game.

The six-foot-three, 230-pound running back accumulated 161 total offensive yards in the Edmonton Elks season-opening 16-12 home loss to the Ottawa Redblacks on Saturday night. Like all CFL players, the contest was Wilder Jr.'s first since the 2019 season as the league cancelled the '20 campaign due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was also Wilder Jr.'s first contest with Edmonton. He spent his first three CFL seasons with Toronto (2017-19) and signed with Montreal in 2020 before retiring, then coming out of retirement to sign a one-year deal with Edmonton on Feb. 9.

"I was adamant about doing my own workout plan this off-season, doing my own treatments, spending more and investing more into my body," Wilder Jr. said. "I expected to have some big games but there are a lot of other things that go into it.

"Our offensive line made it easy and many of my catches came on check-downs because the linebackers were dropping 10 yards deep because they had to respect our receivers. So, yeah, there's a lot more to it but man, it did feel good to get out there and knock off some rust."

Wilder Jr. was a key cog in an offence that rolled up 443 net yards, held the ball for almost 36 minutes and recorded 26 first downs. The former Florida State star rushed for 89 yards on 15 carries and added nine receptions for



Ottawa Redblacks' Abdul Kanneh (14) tackles Edmonton Elks' James Wilder Jr. (32) during their CFL season opener in Edmonton on Saturday. (The Canadian Press)

72 yards.

But finishing was a problem for Edmonton, which settled for four Sean Whyte field goals. Quarterback Trevor Harris was 33-of-44 passing for 333 yards but also had three interceptions, including one Ottawa's Abdul Kanneh returned 102 yards for a touchdown.

"There's a lot more we could've done to make things cleaner (for Harris)," Wilder Jr. said. "I gave up a sack that ended up on him.

"Of course, the quarterback gets the rap but it's a team sport. It's on all of us."

Overall, Elks head coach Jamie Elizondo was happy with Wilder Jr.'s first

contest in an Edmonton jersey.

"I was really impressed with Wilder," Elizondo told reporters. "There are things he's got to get better at, too, and he knows it.

"For the first game, we're really, really disappointed in the loss. We gave that one away."

Before Saturday's kickoff, game officials spoke with Wilder Jr. regarding how he was wearing his uniform. It was tucked up underneath, showing Wilder Jr.'s impressive six-pack.

Elizondo, for one, would like to see his players abide by CFL uniform rules.

"You can't play the game that way so that one is simple," he said. "We do

everything the way it should be done during the game and that was addressed."

Wilder Jr. said he's worn his uniform like that often, adding it's how many players wore their jerseys when his father, James Wilder Sr., was an NFL running back (1981-90 with Tampa Bay, Detroit and Washington). But on Wednesday, Wilder Jr. suggested he'd been fined by the CFL for the look.

"I like the look, it's cool, but the jersey really doesn't go down to my waist it's untuckable," he tweeted. "I respectfully showed the ref the example that it's not long enough to tuck into pants and proceeded to try.

"The ref then threw a joke. I was mic'd so check it and return my fine please."

Wilder Jr. ran for 2,023 yards on 360 carries (5.62-yard average) with nine TDs while registering 154 receptions for 1,487 yards and five touchdowns over three seasons with Toronto. He was the CFL's top rookie in 2017 (rushing for 872 yards and five TDs, adding 51 catches for 533 yards) and capped his campaign helping the Argos win a Grey Cup title.

And although he's only one game into his Edmonton tenure, Wilder Jr. has become a big fan of Elizondo's offence.

"Coach is going to let me pound it, he's going to let me get outside ... he's sending me in motion and getting me one-on-one with linebackers," Wilder Jr. said. "When you're six foot three and 230 pounds you can be taken for a big back who sometimes can only do certain types of plays and kind of be one-dimensional.

"But coach Jamie sees the potential, he sees the skill set I have. It's very diverse and the playbook is very open for the running back so I'm in love with it."

Edmonton (0-1) host Montreal on Saturday night. The Alouettes will be making their season debut so while they'll have recent game film of the Elks to watch, the same won't apply for the home team.

"Part of the game is adjusting on the fly," Wilder Jr. said. "We have a great coaching staff and players to be able to make adjustments.

"You definitely have to be worried about your opponent but at same time we have a lot of things we need to clean up ... I think it's what we need to do in order to get clicking."

The time immediately following a season opener is usually a painful one for players, something that's definitely been compounded with the CFL having not played since 2019. Wilder Jr. said while he worked hard this off-season to prepare himself for a return to the rigours of football, he's been feeling constant reminders about how long he's been away from the game.

"I've been investing in my body and taking care of my body but I guess I forgot (about feeling sore)," he said with a chuckle. "The night of the game it's hard to sleep, you're banged up and bruised up and that next day pretty much outside of treatment you don't leave the bed.

"But I promise you I've been praying to have this feeling back. That sore feeling is all part of the process so you have to enjoy it all."

» The Canadian Press