



When The Passion Returned

BY MONIKA MORAVAN

Heaven has a better selection committee than the Hockey Hall of Fame.

That was my initial reaction upon hearing that Pat Burns, three-time winner of the Jack Adams Award, had died on November 19, 2010.

I have no personal grudges against anyone on the panel responsible for choosing the 2010 inductees. How could someone who grew up a Leafs fan possibly hate Jim Gregory, Pat Quinn, Mike Gartner, or Lanny McDonald? Being of Slovak stock, I can't bear ill will toward Peter Stastny and everyone else in the select group of 18 deserves his spot on the vote squad.

We all make mistakes, and whether the HHOF selection committee considers not inducting Pat Burns while alive to be such an error is a matter for their collective conscience, not mine.

After the initial moments of silence, my mind filled with memories of the Pat Burns era in Toronto Maple Leafs history. The irony was that a few days earlier I had been talking about how the 20th anniversary of the Great Playoff Run of '93 was fast approaching, and how wonderful it would be to have an anniversary remake of *The Passion Returns*. (Paging Chris Clarke, paging Chris Clarke. But I'll take a pass on re-recording "Leafs Are The Best," please and thank you.)

I'll remember Pat Burns but not in the generic way we often have of honouring celebrities from afar. What Burns accomplished with the Leafs reignited my Leafs passion, the craziness that had me cancel all other plans and activities during game time.

Growing up in the 1970s, my hockey world revolved around the Leafs. When a neighbour enrolled me in the local Girl Guides troop that met on Wednesdays, I quit. After all, that was Leafs game night on CHCH TV out of Hamilton and there was no way I could miss out on that, not with Dave Hodge and Dick Beddoes adding splash and dash to the festivities.

That was followed by the 80s, best summed up by the immortal words of Forrest Gump: "And that's all I have to say about that."

There was a faint tinge of Wendel Clark's star power fighting its way through the dark clouds of Harold Ballard's shadow but my eyes had wandered towards Tonawanda. I had taken to watching the Buffalo Sabres solely because of Alexander Mogilny. Long before he joined the Leafs in 2001, as early as the 1987 World Junior Championship, his hockey talents had caught my eye and I watched every Sabres game possible to appreciate his innate stick and puck wizardry.

Just as Mogilny's career was off the runway and reaching cruising height, I had one more reason to celebrate. On January 16, 1991 my man-crush, Peter Zezel, became a Toronto Maple Leaf. No more trips to Metro Ref from my suburban digs to scour through out of town newspapers in search of stories on my favourite centre.

There were still some pains for Leafs fans (okay, so there are always some pains for Leafs fans) until Pat Burns brought his tonic to Toronto. Whatever was in that remedy it had me, for the first time in a decade, putting everything on the backburner to watch my Blue and White.

Despite the heartrending Game 6 loss to Los Angeles in the 1993 Conference Final, I never again lost my Leafs passion. Not even the time a former member of the '93 Leafs shot me a nasty stare when I told him, "There was a game 7." (Note to self: Never, ever, ever do that again!)

I've been fortunate enough to sit in the press box at Air Canada Centre a few times and have mastered the art of not cheering, of doing my job to observe, record and tell stories. What my seat mates may not have realized was that beneath the silent surface, a *czardas* was whirling through my hockey heart.

And for that, I thank Pat Burns.



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Pat Burns will be laid to rest today in Montreal.