

## 50 years of Flyers hockey for these fans



From left are: Bernie Parent, Bill Barber, 95-year-old fan Ed Weinrott, Donna Ashbee (wife of the late Flyer, Barry), Mark Howe, longtime ticketholder Joe Sahina and Bobby Clarke. Zack Hill / Flyers

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There is loyalty, and then there is *loyalty*.

When it comes to the Flyers, Ed Weinrott and Joe Sahina fall in the latter category.

No, they aren't behind-the-scenes men who were part of the ownership group that spent \$2 million to bring the team to Philadelphia 50 years ago.

But they took a chance on the Flyers in another way.

Both are among a small group of fans who have had season tickets since the Flyers played their first game at the venerable Spectrum in 1967. Both were on the Wells Fargo Center ice Tuesday before the game against Anaheim - standing next to Hall of Famers Bernie Parent, Bobby Clarke, Bill Barber, and Mark Howe - as the Flyers held ceremonies celebrating the 50th anniversary of the franchise being awarded.

Weinrott, a Bala Cynwyd resident who is 95 and still practices as an accountant, talked to Clarke about how one of his clients built his first house in South Jersey.

Sahina, 63, the owner of Mr. Auto in his hometown of Berlin, N.J., had an animated conversation with Parent. It turns out the man with whom Sahina shared season tickets in the 1960s and 1970s - the late Ray Marella - used to go hunting with the Hall of Fame goaltender.

"Back in the day, Ray took his son, Michael, to Canada to Bernie's goalie camp," said Sahina, who was 14 when he shared season tickets in 1967. "Bernie and Ray became close friends over the years and did a lot of things together."

Sahina said he was honored to be on the ice with the former Flyers and Donna Ashbee, the wife of the late defenseman Barry Ashbee.

"There's four legends in front of me, and they talk to you like they're your brother," Sahina said. "They thank you for your patronage, and they're humble. That's how hockey players are."

"It was a thrill to meet them," said Weinrott, who during World War II was stationed in Texas in the Army but wasn't sent overseas because of a heart condition.

Before the Flyers were born, Weinrott and Sahina were introduced to hockey by attending minor-league games. Weinrott used to watch the Philadelphia Ramblers play at the Philadelphia Arena, while Sahina went to Jersey Devils games in Cherry Hill in the 1960s.

So when the Flyers came along - they were awarded the franchise in 1966 and played games the following year - both became captivated by the NHL game.

Weinrott had two reasons to buy season tickets: He loved the sport, and he helped his oldest son, Mark, earn some commission.

Mark Weinrott, then a recent high school graduate, talked Flyers president Bill Putnam into hiring him as a summer season-ticket salesman before the Flyers' inaugural season. He sold two tickets to his father, and later - as a 20-year-old - briefly was the ticket manager for the Vancouver Canucks. (Mark Weinrott recently retired from his longtime job as a psychologist in Oregon.)

Sahina would frequently tag along to games with Marella until the late 1970s, when he took over all the tickets. He now goes to games with one of his daughters, Julianne, 26, or Victoria, 23.

"I remember carrying my oldest daughter in my arms into the Spectrum not long after she was born," Sahina said. "My wife would go, and my daughter would sit on my lap and watch the game."

Both paid \$4.50 per ticket for their second-level seats at the Spectrum in 1967. Today, they pay \$72 for comparable seats.

Weinrott, a widower, now goes to about one-third of the games with his 64-year-old son, Richard. "At this stage, I can't afford \$6,600 for season tickets, so I sell some," he said.

Sahina's favorite memory, naturally, was when the Flyers beat Boston to win their first Stanley Cup in 1974. "I can remember leaving that game, and people were running across the top of cars and running around the streets," he said. "It was bedlam. We were so happy, it was unbelievable."

Weinrott also mentioned the epic, 1-0, Game 6 win over Boston as his top memory.

"The other big thrill was the game against the Russians," he said with a laugh, referring to the Red Army finishing its tour against the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Flyers in 1976. "That was so much fun, because Ed Van Impe laid a hit on one of the Russian players, and they didn't like it. They walked off the ice. Ed Snider went down . . . and said, 'You get back on the ice or you're not getting paid for this tour,' so they came back."

Sahina is behind general manager Ron Hextall's patient plan of developing young players and hanging on to draft picks.

"He's keeping all the young talent because in a salary-cap world today, that's what you have to do," he said. "Look at all the teams that have built themselves up. They don't get rid of young talent like we did for all those years."

Weinrott wanted to give coach Dave Hakstol some advice. "There's one suggestion I have. They need to practice penalty shots, shootout shots. I would put a piece of plywood in front of each [goal], and cut out the corners in each one and make the guys practice shooting at the corners," he said. "Each shooter should practice it 15 minutes a day."

Weinrott said he hates shootouts, probably because the Flyers have the NHL's worst record in them since their inception in 2005. But he has mostly good memories from his five decades as a season-ticket holder.

"You don't invest this much money if you're suffering," he cracked.

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