

Kwong, first Chinese-Canadian in NHL, dies at 94

Played one shift for Rangers in 1948; member of British Columbia Sports Hall of Fame

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Larry Kwong, who broke an NHL barrier in 1948 when he became the first Chinese-Canadian to play in the League, died at his home in Calgary on March 15. He was 94.

Kwong's historic NHL moment was literally that, a single shift of less than a minute for the New York Rangers at the end of a [6-3 loss to the Montreal Canadiens on March 13, 1948](#) at the Montreal Forum.

Born June 17, 1923 in Vernon, British Columbia, Kwong had taken a meandering path to the NHL, having played in his hometown before joining the Canadian Army, rising to the rank of corporal while he was stationed in Red Deer and Wetaskiwin, Alberta.

According to hockey historian and author Andrew Podnieks, Kwong joined the New York Rovers of the Eastern Hockey League upon his discharge from the armed forces, having been signed by a Rangers scout. He attended Rangers training camp in the fall of 1947 before he was shipped down to the Rovers.

Kwong would forever wonder how much the social climate of the day played into the fact that his NHL career would last little more than the blink of an eye. He was sent back to the Rovers immediately after his one game.

"I was disappointed because when I made the (Rangers), the whole country had my name in the paper that I was playing in the game," Kwong told CBC News in a 2013 interview. "And it turned out, I didn't get much of a chance."

A CBC obituary related how Kwong and his family, grocers in Vernon, faced segregation and were banned at the time from voting, as were all Chinese-Canadians.

But no matter the hurdles he faced, Kwong worked hard at improving his hockey skills and grew to love the sport while he listened to Saturday "Hockey Night in Canada" games on the radio. He said he merely "toughed it out" in hockey against long odds he faced.



The 1950-51 Alexander Trophy-winning Valleyfield Braves of the Quebec Major Hockey League. Larry Kwong is in the back row, second from right. Future Montreal Canadiens coach Toe Blake, the Braves coach, is in the middle row, fourth from right.

As a teen and into his early 20s, Kwong played for a variety of teams in several leagues in British Columbia before joining the Rovers in 1946-47, settling for seven years after his Rangers experience with the Valleyfield Braves of the Quebec Senior and Quebec Major leagues. With the Braves in 1950-51, he won the league's most valuable player award after scoring 85 points (34 goals, 51 assists) in 60 games.

By the mid-1950s, Kwong was in England, having gone overseas for what he thought would be a year but ultimately staying for 15. He played in Britain and skated in Switzerland, too, retiring to a career in sporting goods in the latter country where he also taught tennis with his brother, Jack.

Kwong returned to Canada in 1972 to run a supermarket chain in Calgary, which he did until he retired in 1995, celebrated in that city with its Asian Heritage Award. He was elected to the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame in 2013 after a teacher and student in Vernon began a campaign to have him enshrined. He was also inducted into the Okanagan (British Columbia) and Alberta Sports Halls of Fame.