

## Aurora Sports Hall of Fame 2023: Inductee Frank 'Pete' Machell: National lacrosse legend has deep roots in Aurora



Frank 'Pete' Machell will be inducted posthumously into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame this week and by all accounts both historical and familial the legendary athlete was not only a great lacrosse player, but he could play hockey at a high level, too.

My weekend interview with the lacrosse legend's great-nephew, Gary Machell, yielded some terrific insights and a treasure trove of anecdotes about this Aurora-born sportsman.

Gary Machell, who currently resides in Keswick, is an enthusiastic family historian and provided engaging primary source documents as backgrounders to Pete Machell's accomplishments on the lacrosse field and the hockey rink.

During our interview, Gary Machell disclosed that his grandfather's brother was only lightly-connected to the family's thriving brickyard business in Aurora because he was so fully occupied as a two-season athlete.

'Pete was always involved in sports. It was lacrosse in the summer and hockey in the winter as it was with so many Canadians of his generation. Pete's father owned the brickyard on Tyler Street, but I'm not sure how much work Pete did at the brickyard. Pete had a tremendous influence on my brother and cousins in sports. I missed Pete by two years. I was born in 1948 and he passed in 1946, but I was raised by men born and raised in the 1800s.'

Pete Machell's nephew has researched his uncle's records and is an engaging source of local history about the diminutive lacrosse and hockey star.

'Pete was only 5'6" but he competed ferociously against bigger opponents. He was a senior national champion in lacrosse in 1931 when his Brampton Excelsiors captured the Mann Cup. It's often said that he set the foundations for the Excelsiors' lacrosse program which is still a successful organization today. I'm also impressed by his scoring consistency. He was a Top Ten scorer in Canada's best league for over a decade: 1st in 1922; 5th in 1923; 5th in 1925; 4th in 1926; 10th in 1927. In addition to being a fine field lacrosse player at both the junior and intermediate levels, Pete played right wing for Aurora's hockey teams that won two Metro Cup championships as Ontario's top team. He was a multiple-champion in both sports and also served his country in World War 1 as a member of the 127th Eastern Canadian Battalion he was part of the 12th York Region.'

When asked about the most interesting historical tidbit about Pete Machell, Gary is quick off the mark with a humorous anecdote.

?An interesting fact about Pete?despite all the ?Blood and Thunder Hockey' he participated in for decades--he still had his front teeth, which was a miracle when you think about that era of sport.?

In addition to retaining his front teeth and winning the Mann Cup in 1931, I asked Gary what he thought Pete's biggest athletic accomplishment was in his exemplary lacrosse career.

?Current management of the Brampton Excelsiors have recognized that the organization became a lacrosse superpower due to Pete's great play on the field. The franchise's reign as Canada's best lacrosse team for years grew out of Pete's championship years in Brampton.?

Gary Machell, a former baseball umpire and baseball head coach, said he is pleased that excellent lacrosse teams are thriving in the Aurora-Newmarket area in 2023 as part of Pete's legacy.

We discuss the St. Andrew's College Saints' varsity field lacrosse team that won the Conference of Independent Schools championship in 2022 and the Newmarket Firebirds who have championship-calibre clubs in their program and were just recognized for excellence in lacrosse at last weekend's Sport Aurora Breakfast of Champions at Stonehaven.

The family's connection with the Town continues not only with landmarks like Machell Park and Machell Street, but with Gary's grandkids who were born and raised in Aurora. Gary notes proudly that ?My grandson loves the fact that he can play in Pete's Park.?

Even though he passed away 77 years ago, Frank ?Pete? Machell's connection to Aurora manifests itself in so many ways through a park, a street, the newest generation of Machell children residing and thriving in the town, and, on Wednesday, he'll secure permanent residency in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame as one of four inductees in 2023.

**By Jim Stewart**