

SEARCHING FOR BERNIE MORRIS

The Other Stanley Cup Story of 1919

by Eric Zweig

THE SEATTLE METROPOLITANS of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association became the first American-based team to win the Stanley Cup in 1917. The star of the series was Bernie Morris. He was coming off a season that had seen him score a career-high 37 goals in just 24 games and lead the PCHA with 54 points. Morris then scored 14 goals in the four-game Stanley Cup set with the Montreal Canadiens, including six in a 9–1 victory in the fourth and final game. Morris had another fine season in 1918–19, finishing second in the PCHA in both goals (22) and points (29), yet when the Metropolitans met up with Montreal in the Stanley Cup Finals again that year, Bernie Morris was no longer in the lineup.

What happened?

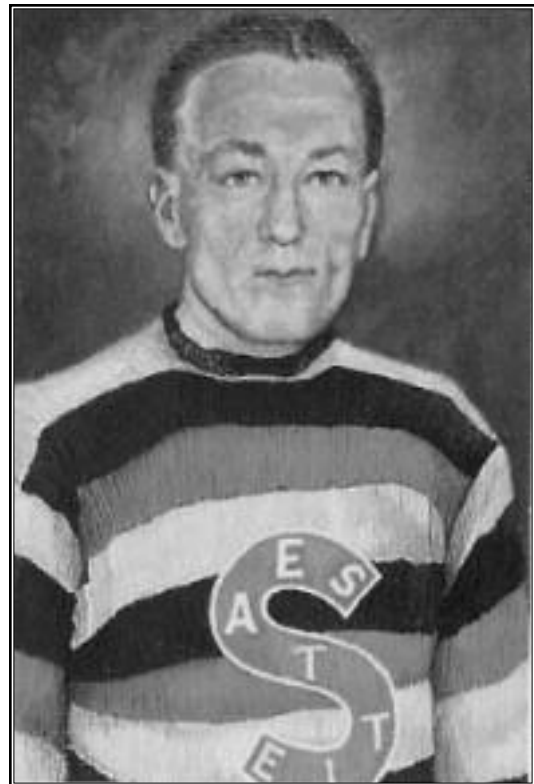
Bernie Morris had been arrested!

The United States government was charging him with evading the draft.

It turned out that as a Canadian citizen employed in the United States, Morris had been registered under the military service acts in both countries, but had received exemptions in each of them. His status in the United States was later changed however, though not until the First World War was practically over. Morris had an off-season job working in the woods of northern British Columbia, and the draft notice sent to him in November of 1918 was never forwarded out of Vancouver due to the uncertain mail service in rural communities during the time of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic (the same epidemic that would later end the 1919 Stanley Cup series before a winner could be declared). Still, on April 12, 1919, Bernie Morris was convicted of being a deserter from the U.S. Army by general court martial at Camp Lewis in Tacoma, Washington. He was sentenced to two years hard labor and due to be incarcerated at Alcatraz!

Pacific Coast Hockey Association president Frank Patrick vowed he would fight the case right up to the President of the United States. The Canadian government

also got involved. I have not found evidence that Morris was ever sent to Alcatraz, but it was almost a full year before he was finally exonerated. He missed the entire 1919–20 hockey season, but was allowed to return in time for Seattle's 1920 Stanley Cup series with the NHL's Ottawa Senators. He went on to play five more seasons in the PCHA, the Western Canada Hockey League and the NHL.



A portrait of Bernie Morris, commissioned for The Stanley Cup Centennial Book.