

# Historica Canada Education Portal

## Jacques Plante

### Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Jacques Plante biography from [The Canadians](#) series. Jacques Plante, a native of Mont Carmel, Québec, brought revolutionary changes to the game of hockey. He was the first goalie to leave the crease of the net and, most importantly, the first player to wear a protective face mask.

### Aims

In a variety of activities, students will assess Plante's contributions to the game of hockey and research other historical changes to the game. Students will have the opportunity to debate how changes to the game of hockey have influenced the need for the wearing of protective gear.

### Background

Many will say that Jacques Plante was the greatest hockey goaltender ever to play the game. Even those that don't agree with this will admit that no goaltender has ever changed the face of hockey the way Jacques Plante did during his twenty-year NHL career – winning seven Vézina trophies (for the league's best goaltender), six Stanley Cups, and one

Hart Trophy (for the league's most valuable player).

Jacques Plante was born in 1929 in Mont Carmel, Québec. This dynamic man's passion for hockey began at a young age. As one of eleven Plante children growing up in poverty, he learned to knit his own hockey socks and toques – necessities for cold winters on rural Québec ponds and rinks. As a young man, Plante also suffered from asthma. His desire to play hockey, however, could not be deterred by this health condition, so rather than playing the strenuous position of defense man, he developed his skills as one of the most formidable goaltenders that has ever played in the National Hockey League.

He began playing goal for a factory team in Shawinigan before turning professional with the Montréal Royals in 1951. He made it to the NHL in 1953 as a back-up goalie for the Montréal Canadiens, and became their first string goalkeeper the following year. He then went on to win five straight Vézina Trophies and five consecutive Stanley Cups. He feuded with legendary coach Toe Blake and was traded in 1963 to the New York Rangers. His career continued on for another ten years with stops in St. Louis (where he won another Vezina Trophy in 1969), Toronto, Boston, and then to the Edmonton Oilers of the WHA.

But, Jacques Plante was more than just a good goalie: he was an innovator and a character. He revolutionized the way the game was played and he was a true eccentric in a time when eccentric athletes were not welcome in professional sports.

Plante was the first goalie to leave his net during play. Most goalies stayed firmly ensconced between the pipes but Jacques, an excellent skater, would often skate into the corners to play the puck and was known to take off up the ice stickhandling the puck – much to Toe Blake's

chagrin. Perhaps Plante is best known for introducing the face mask. He invented the mask, designed his own and used it regularly in practice. Blake refused to allow him to use it during games believing that it impaired his vision. In a game in November, 1959, Plante was struck in the face with the puck and was taken off to the dressing room for stitches and he refused to return to the ice without his mask. Blake couldn't afford to have his star goalie out of action and relented. Plante wore the mask in every game he played thereafter and within ten years, every goalie in the league had followed suit.

Plante was a true loner who didn't mix with the other players. He was an avid knitter who knitted his own long underwear. He died prematurely in Switzerland in 1986 where he had been living since his retirement in 1975.

## **Activities**

**Time Allowance:** 1 - 4 hours

### **Procedures:**

1. Using the student worksheet as a resource, create a time line to illustrate the key events in Jacques Plante's life from birth to death. Include nine key events or developments. Organize your students in small groups of three or four, and then direct them to choose three events that they think were turning points in Plante's life. Have them support their decisions. Compare the events the students have selected and encourage them to discuss why different events are important to different people. Emphasize that there is more than one answer and that all answers need to be supported with facts and well-constructed arguments.

2. Jacques Plante was the first goalie to wear a protective mask. Have the students debate whether the mask should be allowed. Divide the students into teams of three or four to prepare the debates. Students may need to conduct some further research into how changes to the game of hockey have influenced the need for the wearing of protective gear, and in turn how changes in hockey gear may or may not have influenced how the game is played. The winners of the debates will be based upon convincing arguments and presentation abilities.

3. The hockey mask was just the beginning of new technologies affecting the game of hockey. List all the new and improved protective hockey equipment that has been introduced to the sport. Now try to predict what other new equipment and improvements could be introduced for hockey gear over the next 10-20 years.

4. As a hockey celebrity, Jacques Plante was in the limelight, and his name was often found in the headlines. Have the students create a newspaper article recounting one of the highlights of Plante's life or hockey career. They may want to look at microfiche of old newspapers and magazines or old video clips to gain information. They may also want to use their parents and grandparents as sources as well.

5. Have the students write an obituary or Lives Lived column for Jacques Plante. (For examples of obituaries, refer to your local newspaper or go to [The Globe and Mail](#)).

6. Toe Blake did not approve of Plante wearing his protective mask. Have the students write letters convincing the National Hockey League officials to permit the mask in regular season and playoff games. They may choose to be concerned fans, family members, or NHL players. The letter

must state the case, the concern and have support for the argument as it is to be used to convince a change in uniform regulation to include the wearing of protective gear.

## **Resources**

[Jacques Plante Worksheet](#)

[Jacques Plante - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Ice Hockey - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Hockey: Canada's Game - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

O'Brien, Andy. *The Jacques Plante Story*. Toronto, New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972.

Plante, Raymond. *Jacques Plante: derriere le masque*. Montreal: XYZ, 1996.

Plante, Jacques. *Goaltending*. New York, Collier Books, 1973.