

Follow the Puck

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Doug MacCormack followed hockey to British Columbia in 1967 and, 32 years later, the videographer and recreational hockey player says he found his dream – on and off the rink.

Doug grew up in Nova Scotia playing his favourite sport with nine siblings on the rink in their backyard. An avid Montreal Canadiens fan, he played Junior A hockey in Cape Breton, and remembers how he and his father started their own team.

“My father and I were sitting at the table one day and we decided, ‘Wow we have enough players for a junior team,’” Doug recalls. “We formed the junior team, and won the Nova Scotia title. The next year, the team won the Maritime title. A couple of years ago, the World Juniors were in Cape Breton and Halifax, and to think back that we started the team. They had a team from that point on.”

In 1963, after high school, Doug got a job at a CBC-affiliated TV station in Sydney as a cameraman. Back then television was black and white. They had one channel, and the only choice was to turn it on or off. At the time, the cameras the station used were from New York, and were as big as cars. It took four men to lift them from the pedestals, and videotapes didn’t exist, so everything, including the commercials, was live.

“In those days, to work at the TV station in Cape Breton, was a really big deal,” says Doug. One night, after Doug had been working at the TV station for about four years, he heard an announcement that Vancouver was getting an NHL team – the future Canucks. “I’m going to Vancouver,” Doug said to the other cameraman.

That year, Doug said goodbye to the TV station and his family, and hitchhiked across the country en route to Vancouver. He spent time at the world’s fair, Montreal, worked in Banff, and experienced the hippie movement in San Francisco before landing on the West Coast of British Columbia.

Doug joined the CBC in 1967, only, this time, he wasn’t a cameraman. In a time of cutbacks, layoffs, and an enormous focus on the world’s fair, the only job open was the mailboy. Doug took the position and used it as an opportunity to get to know everyone at the station while delivering the mail. When more jobs opened up the next year, Doug was hired on as a cameraman.

When the Canucks joined the NHL in 1970, the first portable camera was available at the TV station. At the time, most people shot in film, but Doug had access to new technology with both indoor and outdoor capabilities.

“It had a backpack, and I looked like the man on the moon,” Doug laughs. “It was the only portable in Western Canada, so I got to go to all of the major sporting events, and I had to shoot the Canucks every night for highlights.”

Over the course of 10 years, Doug covered about 500 games, including the Russia-Canada series in 1972. For Hockey Night in Canada, he filmed between the benches.

“Looking back, out of 10 kids in the family, I was the only one who didn’t graduate from university. When I left Sydney, my father thought I would come home, and was giving up a good job. One night, during the game, when I was between the benches, the Montreal Canadiens were playing cross the country, and the announcer said, ‘There’s Doug MacCormack. I’m sure his father’s back home watching from his chair in Cape Breton.’ After that, my father thought I had made it,” says Doug.

While it was a thrill to cover games, Doug enjoyed attending practices more than anything. A favourite memory comes from Edmonton Oiler practices, when Glen Anderson’s mother came to the rink with salmon sandwiches, which the team would eat afterwards.

“I would pay \$100 to go to a practice, but not to go to a game,” says Doug. “The job took you inside – inside a player’s life, to watch them practise, and the way they did things, and who was in charge.”

In 1976, television news switched from film to video. Doug had the first ENG (Electronic News Gathering) camera in B.C., so news became a priority over sports. Where film had to be developed over the course of hours or even a day, video was instant, which suited news broadcasts.

“When a big story happened, they would go for the video camera because it was instant, and you could have it on the national feed as well,” says Doug.

While there were many highlights in Doug’s career, there were also sad moments. On March 24, 1989, Doug was one of the first cameramen on the scene of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. He rode on the premier’s Lear jet, which flew above the scene on the way in. Doug describes it as a big black ring around the boat.

“It was like Mother Earth was shot,” he says. “The next day, the wind was howling from the northwest, and it picked up the oil like drifting snow in Edmonton.”

When Doug thinks about capturing moments on video, whether it’s sports, news or nature, his biggest advice is not to fear it or be overwhelmed with the situation. He thinks back to the riot in Vancouver, in 1994, after the Canucks lost to the New York Rangers in Game 7.

“You get there, and you’re going for the guy who’s throwing rocks through the window... You follow the puck, you get the moment.”

Now 65, Doug is slowly winding down from his career in the television business. He still works occasionally, and covered the B.C. election in May.

“The business is very addictive,” he says. “Every day, I’d go to work and not know where I was going.”



These days, he plays more hockey. Three times a week, he hits the rink with a group of men his age. They have no referees, but form teams and go to tournaments. Last year, Doug played more hockey than he did when he played in the juniors.

“When I’m driving to the hockey rink, I feel like a little kid,” he says. “When you’re on the rink, nothing else enters your mind.”

Much like videography, for Doug, it’s about following the puck and capturing the moment.

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