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Coach Kelley and the Kelley Coach

Legendary Hockey Coach Jack Kelley Drops Puck, Mules Shut Out Bowdoin

By Stephen Collins '74 | Photography by Dustin Satloff '15

In the middle of a legendary career in big-time hockey—two Division I NCAA national championships at Boston University, founding the World Hockey Association Hartford Whalers and winning the first WHA league trophy, and later front-office jobs in the NHL—Jack Kelley returned to Colby in 1976-77 after 15 years away to coach men's ice hockey for a year.



Forward Michael Rudolf '18, of Zug, Switzerland, scores in Colby's 3-0 shutout win against Bowdoin Dec. 4.

It wasn't Kelley's usual championship effort (in his first stint, he turned Colby into an ECAC power); the Mules lost twice as many games as they won that year. But now, almost 40 years in the rearview mirror, that season has a fairytale quality to it. Players who suited up for Kelley then were so shaped by the experience that they recently led an effort to endow the Jack Kelley Head Coach for Colby Men's Hockey—to the tune of \$2 million.

When a celebration of the first endowed hockey coach position in NESCAC was held Dec. 4 at Colby, Kelley, now 88 and walking with a cane, took center ice at the Alford Rink, where he was the first Colby coach to skate a team in 1955 during his first run as Colby's head coach. With his some of his former players and most of his family on hand, Kelley dropped the ceremonial first puck for the 205th edition of the Bowdoin-Colby game, which the *New York Times* called one of the biggest small-college rivalries.

The current-day Mules then took the ice and put the icing on the cake, shutting out their archrivals 3-0.

At a dinner before the game, Kelley told the gathering, "I keep wondering. How does a guy who yelled and blew a whistle have a position named after me?"

“What a moment in my life!” he said. “I have my family here. I have my wife Ginny. Sixty-two years she’s been *my* coach and truly at my side all through these incredible wonderful years. This is such a great moment for both of us.”

President David A. Greene, who introduced Kelley, said of the named coaching position,

“Symbolically, among other things, it’s an effort for us to boost this program that has such a proud history and to be able to make it the very best program in NESCAC, and we’d love to see it as one of the very best programs in the country. That’s what happened when we had Coach Kelley as coach, and that’s what’s going to happen again.”

Kelley first served as head coach at Colby from 1955 to 1962, compiling an 89-51-5 record and perhaps more importantly going 16-1 against Bowdoin in that span. In 1961-62 his team went 17-1 to lead the ECAC. Afterward he moved to Boston University and won national titles in 1971 and 1972. Moving to the WHA he won the inaugural Avco World Trophy in 1973, working with All-American Ron Ryan '62, who played for Kelley at Colby and still owns nine men’s ice hockey records here.

The highlight of Kelley’s return engagement at Colby, in 1976-77, was his 300th career win, which came against Div. I Northeastern. He returned to the Whalers the following year and worked in the NHL for the Detroit Red Wings organization and was president of the Pittsburgh Penguins. He was inducted into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame in 1993.

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elder Kelley, can hope for the same. His son Cam MacDonald '18 currently plays forward for the Mules.



Flanked by team captains and Alford Director of Athletics Tim Wheaton, Jack O’Neil ’77, President David Greene, and Jack Kelley Head Coach of Men’s Hockey Blaise MacDonald, Kelley (center), drops the ceremonial first puck Dec. 4.

One fan on hand Friday was Kelley’s son, Mark Kelley ’80, senior director of amateur scouting for the NHL champion Chicago Blackhawks, who fulfilled roles as both a Jack Kelley family member and former player. Mark said that rather than encountering conflict when he played that year for his dad, “It brought us closer together.”

Jack Kelley Head Coach for Men’s Hockey Blaise MacDonald, a personal friend of the

“He touched all of our lives in different ways, some more significant than others,” said Jack O’Neil ’77, who counts Kelley as a coach, the man who got him his first job and launched his successful real-estate career, and a lifelong mentor. “When I started dialing for dollars in April, the response was just overwhelming,” O’Neil said. “We’re friends, we were teammates, and we shared a common love for our coach. As I said to coach Kelley Friday night, I had no idea what to expect but we exceeded my wildest dreams.”

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