

**Massachusetts Hockey Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony
November 19, 2008**

Tom Burke Acceptance Speech for Walter A. Brown.

Thank you...this is such a distinct honor to be with you tonight, and to represent my uncle Walter and the Brown family, as he is enshrined in the Massachusetts Hockey Hall of Fame. I first would like to acknowledge the other members of our family who have joined us this evening:

Walter's nieces, my cousins Carol and Dorothea, and Carol's daughter Karen – the only member of our family thus far to run the Boston Marathon.

My second cousin, Walter's granddaughter Christina, along with her father Tom, Walter's son-in-law, and Christina's fiancé Kaz. Thanks to you all for being with us tonight.

Whenever I have the opportunity to tell people about my uncle Walter, I emphasize that he was first and foremost a hockey man. Next of course to his beloved wife Marjorie and their daughter Margie, hockey was the love of his life.

Yes, there were many other – and sometimes better remembered – accomplishments in my uncle's career. He's the man who hired Red Auerbach to build the Celtics dynasty – and it was he who broke the color line in the NBA. He kept the Marathon and BAA alive through many lean years...ran both the Garden and the Arena...boosted the schoolboy sports like the great Tech Tournament in basketball, the track meets, ice shows, the college events. Walter Brown was ever-present – as organizer, promoter, financier, - and biggest fan.

But hockey was Walter Brown's game. He began with his father at Boston Arena – still a great hockey venue after all these years. His first very public accomplishment in hockey was winning the World Championship with the Massachusetts Rangers. I suspect that not everybody here tonight realized Massachusetts gave our country its first world title.

Walter was just 28 years old back in 1933 when he assembled and coached that team, first one ever, from any country, to beat Canada. He was also the man who hired Jack Riley to coach the 1960 Olympic Team. He encouraged Jack to make the eleventh-hour addition of the Cleary brothers, and that made the difference when the U.S. won its first Olympic Gold at Squaw Valley.

In all the intervening years between 1933 and 1960, Walter Brown was the guiding force for American Amateur hockey. There was so much else too – presidency of the Bruins, the Boston Olympics, the Boston Tigers, presidency of the International Ice Hockey Federation, prime mover of our beloved Beanpot Tournament.

His boys from the 1933 team got together for their 20th reunion and established the Walter Brown Award for the best American-born college player in New England. It's the nation's oldest nationally recognized college hockey award.

All those great things he did for the game of hockey – professional and amateur, national and international – would be more than enough to earn him a niche in the Hall of Fame. But that, to me, is only part of the story. I've said he was a hockey man. I'd like to tell you what I really mean by that.

Several weeks after my uncle Walter died back in 1964, there was a tribute to him at the Jimmy Fund building in Boston. Walter and Lou Perini, who owned the Boston Braves, were great friends and early supporters of Doctor Sidney Farber in his research for a cure for cancer. Here is part of what Dr. Farber, and Walter's friend Father Joe Doherty, said that day:

“...it is uniquely appropriate and especially fitting that in this Children's Cancer Research Foundation Jimmy Fund Auditorium, we gather to pay tribute to him for some of the things made possible in a lifetime of effort.

“Like the very best of all memorials, its real service is inspiring in the minds of men and women recollections that constitute in their own way a kind of immortality. When the lights go up in Boston Garden, when the organ bursts forth, when the Celtics appear on the court or the Bruins come onto the ice, memories will be awakened and revived.

“The elderly lady with her grandson in the box seat will remember the man who made their visit to the rodeo a joy. The newspaperman in the press section will think of all the happy occasions when the man joined his friends in the sports world with those of the newspaper world. The politician in the front row will think, as the lights go up, of the many times this man made the lights go up for a political party. The Armed Services veteran in the back row will think of the trouble this man took to bring athletes to the USO clubs. The teenage boy on the outside left aisle will think again of the way he was encouraged to leave the streets and go into the arena to play hockey with funds that this man helped provide.

“If none could enter the Boston Garden except by presenting a personal account of a gift of this man's time, talent, counsel, or money to some person or cause in need of human kindness and help, not a seat in the Garden would be empty.

“And in every audience that ever gathers, they will all remember. They will pass on to their children the memory of a man who felt that every charity or worthy cause had a claim on him.

“He was the exemplar of civic duty in a community where it is sometimes appealed to in vain. To these public virtues were added the personal virtues of gentleness, kindness, thoughtfulness, humility, and love of his family.

“In a city that has only residents, he was a first citizen. In a life crowded with conflicting claims he was a citizen first.

“What he was, what he did, what he said and what he thought for the good of his fellow man, each time as the lights go up in Boston Garden, on down through the years, he will be freshly remembered.”

This, my friends, is the hockey man that we freshly remember tonight. I don't know exactly what it is about this game – its speed, its roughness, the harsh conditions you endure simply to play it, the sacrifices it demands of you for the good of the team....But there's something about ice hockey that brings out the very best in the people who play it and love it.

Next March, when they're talking Hobey Baker Award in the colleges, take a good look at the young men and women under consideration for the Humanitarian Award. These are truly the best of the best, and there are so many more like them, throughout the game of ice hockey. And you know who they are.

When hockey people leave the ice, they do for others, just as my uncle Walter did throughout his life. It's in their nature. It's in your nature. It certainly was what made Walter Brown such a wonderful man.

Tonight we make a special salute to Walter Brown and his Massachusetts Rangers, our first world champions – John Garrison, Sherm Forbes, Stew Inglehart, Ding Palmer, Channing Hilliard, Frank Holland, James Breckenridge, Ben Langmaid, Gerry Cosby. They're with him tonight, cheering and high fiving him up there in the Second Balcony.

As we do this evening, his boys of 1933 thank him for what he did, but more importantly, we honor him for who he was.

For my uncle Walter, and on behalf of all who knew and loved him, I both proudly and humbly accept your invitation to the Massachusetts Hockey Hall of Fame. Thank you.

