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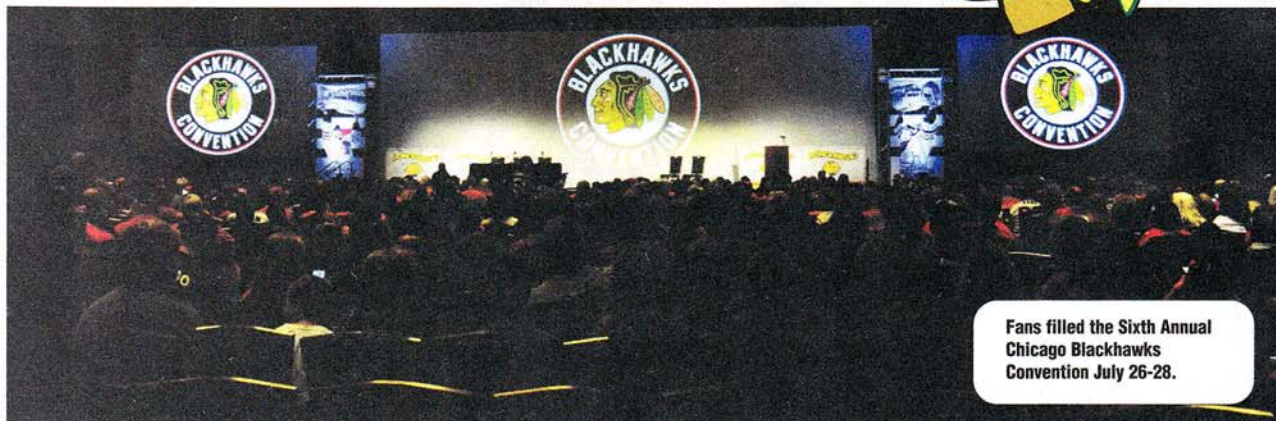
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PUCK POWWOW

SIXTH ANNUAL BLACKHAWKS CONVENTION GIVES FANS A CHANCE TO MEET THEIR HEROES

By Sal J. Barry | Contributing Editor
Photos by Shellie Lewis



Fans filled the Sixth Annual Chicago Blackhawks Convention July 26-28.

For the thousands of fans in attendance, the Sixth Annual Chicago Blackhawks Convention was a great opportunity to see many of their favorite players in a casual, relaxed off-ice setting. Among the weekend's (July 26-28) activities were numerous panel discussions with both current and retired players, an interactive room where fans could test their hockey skills, a dealer

area with numerous vendors selling hockey cards and memorabilia, and autograph sessions with the players.

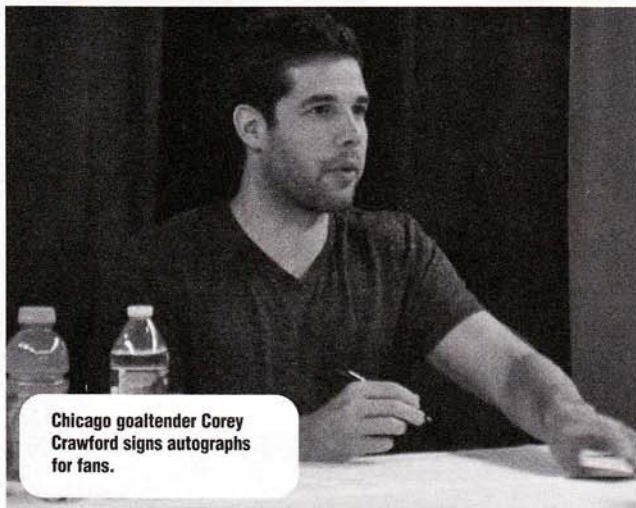
"I've been a 'Hawks fan all my life, so this is a great opportunity," said Mike McCauley, who has followed the team since the 1970s. "We get to see all the players, get autographs and meet other fans. This is such a clean, healthy atmosphere."

Mike and his son Sean have attended the past two Blackhawks Conventions. The biggest draw for them? "Definitely getting autographs," Sean McCauley said. "And being around 10,000 'Hawks fans is pretty cool. There's always somebody to talk to, something to talk about."

Fellow convention-goer Roman Rokiciak echoed that sentiment: "I love the fact that you can get a whole bunch of Blackhawks fans in



Fans tested their hockey skills in the interactive area.



Chicago goaltender Corey Crawford signs autographs for fans.

one place to celebrate," he said. "Especially after they won the Cup."

Most of the players from the 2013 Stanley Cup-winning team were at the convention, including Corey Crawford, Patrick Sharp, Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane. The legends were there too: Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita, Tony Esposito, Pierre Pilote and Denis Savard. Over 40 players, past and present, were on hand over the weekend.

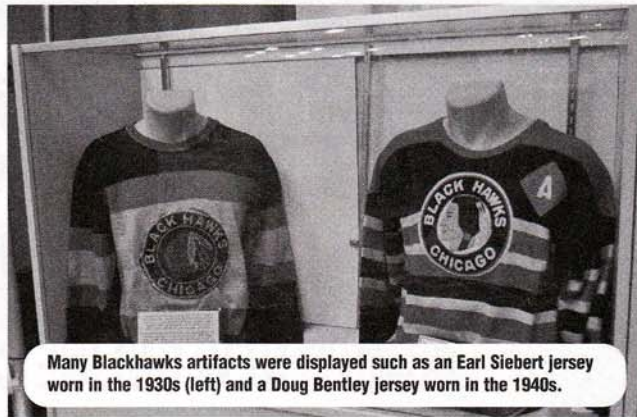
The Stanley Cup was also at the convention on that Saturday. Thousands of fans lined up to see hockey's most cherished trophy.

Another popular attraction was an improvisational comedy show, featuring actors from The Second City – the renowned theater from Chicago – who teamed up with Blackhawks players Bryan Bickell, Brandon Saad, Andrew Shaw and Ben Smith.

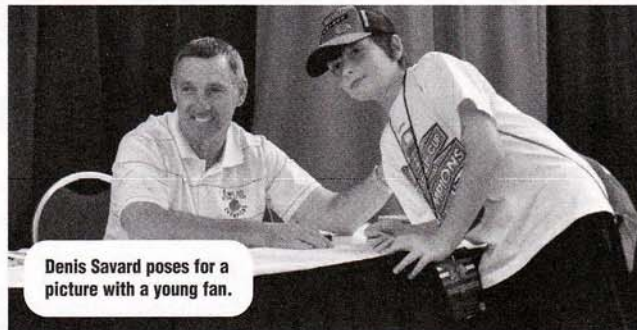
"It's kind of hard for the players to do improv stuff," Sean McCauley said, "so it's

fun seeing them try something else. The jokes are pretty hilarious. [Second City] did a smart job of writing inside jokes that Blackhawks fans would get."

One complaint among some fans, though, was that it was tough to get an autograph from many of the popular current players such as Toews, Kane and Shaw. Each attendee was given a scratch-off ticket; winning tickets would net an autograph from



Many Blackhawks artifacts were displayed such as an Earl Siebert jersey worn in the 1930s (left) and a Doug Bentley jersey worn in the 1940s.



Denis Savard poses for a picture with a young fan.

her mother Tammy to attend the show. "But you can get a puck signed and see how their career progresses."

Not surprisingly, pucks were one of the strongest selling items on the sales floor.

"Pucks were our biggest seller, not photos" said Diane Bogar, co-owner of D & P Collectibles. "People buy pucks because they don't always know whose autograph they're going to get. We might bring 500 photos to sell, but come home with 490."

The star players may have been tough to get, but many players, prospects and retired 'Hawks were relatively easy to get an autograph from if you had a little patience. The other attractions, from seeing unique artifacts – such as all of the NHL's major trophies and vintage, game-worn jerseys – to hearing stories from your favorite players, rounded out the weekend and made for a memorable event.

"We're definitely coming next year," Korff said. "We're going to come every year. It's a really, really great event."

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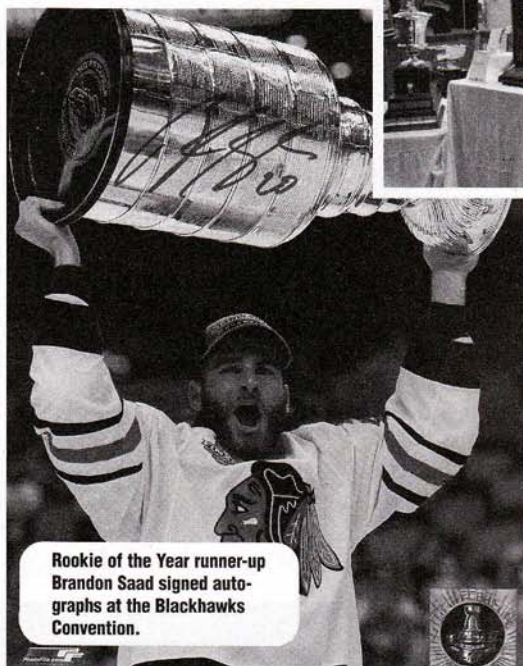


Fans could take photos of the major NHL trophies. The Stanley Cup (not pictured) was at the convention on Saturday.

either a current popular player or a retired great at a designated day and time. The only problem was that you didn't know whose autograph you were getting from until the player arrived.

This was frustrating for many fans, who may have wanted a specific photo or trading card autographed, while others took it in stride.

"There's always the chance that you can get [an autograph from] a player that you don't know a lot about, like the newer players," said Katie Korff, who traveled three hours from Fulton, Missouri, with



Rookie of the Year runner-up Brandon Saad signed autographs at the Blackhawks Convention.