

First

—in honour of the 60th anniversary of Willie O’Ree’s first NHL game

Ian LeTourneau, City of Fredericton Cultural Laureate 2016-2018

2018

The Bruins called: “we want O’Ree.”

You — skilled, fleet-footed O’Ree,
who skated to school in Fredericton winters —
now destined to lace up against
Belliveau, Geoffrion, and your hero,
the Rocket. “Surreal,” you said.

January 18, 1958:

a dazzling sheet of Forum ice, the setting.
A Saturday night, Hockey Night in Canada.
Hardly slept the night before.

The team said they’d back you up.
Left wing to McKenney; Toppazzini
on the right. Butterflies in your stomach
in the first but then you relaxed.
In the third, a near miss — a pass received
in close, already past Harvey, whose veins
were the blue line — you were hooked
by Johnson, stopped by Plante.

But your Bruins swaggered
to a 3-0 victory. And despite the shutout
of sight in one eye, you had made it.
Your vision since childhood realized.

We rub our eyes 60 years later,
that diamond surface still brilliant.
Three times the goal light flashed
red that night. No points for you,
no credit on the scoresheet,
but unknown to you, your name,
followed by “first,” appears indelibly
on the scoresheet of history.