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# First Chinese-Canadian NHL player talks racial discrimination

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There was once a time when Larry Kwong, 88, of Vernon was in the rough and tumble game of professional hockey, even making it all the way to the top.

"I was very happy because my goal was to play in the NHL and I finally said to myself, I finally made it," Kwong said.

And it was a moment that changed hockey forever.

Less than a year after Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier for professional baseball, Kwong stepped onto the ice to play for the New York Rangers in 1948.

In doing so, Kwong became the first person of colour to play in the NHL.

"I was very happy because all the papers throughout Canada had big write-ups about me," he said.

But those write-ups seemed to be gathering dust, until now.

A new documentary called Lost Years, which premiered in Kwong's hometown of Vernon on Wednesday, is shining a light on the former hockey player's story of beating the odds and overcoming racial discrimination.

"When I was a young boy, I couldn't just go to any barber shop. They won't take me because I was Chinese. It didn't make me feel good. It made me feel that I can't just go to a certain place or restaurant. I would have to make sure they don't mind and let me go in," he said.

But because he stood out, Kwong says it made him stick out in the hockey world.

He was often called the China Clipper and King Kwong.

"When I played hockey for the Hydrophones, when I get two or three goals, they would write it up," he said. "They would say Chinese boy scored so many goals whereas if I wasn't [Chinese], they probably wouldn't say a word about me."

Kwong's goal was to become a professional hockey player.

He quickly moved up in the hockey world and eventually signed with the New York Rovers, but his journey to the top wasn't exactly smooth sailing.

"I was the leading scorer for the New York Rovers and I was the last to be called up. Now some people ask me, was it because you were Chinese? Maybe I don't know, I don't know," he said.

Kwong's time on the ice for the NHL was short; he played one minute for the Rangers in his only big-league game.

But his legacy was endured.

A new crop of Asian NHL stars, such as Zachary Yuen who was drafted by the Winnipeg Jets, is taking over and Kwong says he hopes it's just the beginning of something greater.

"I think it's good. There's not enough actually that are playing but I'm sure Yuen, [Brandon] Yip, they're playing for NHL teams now so I hope there will be more, I really do," Kwong said.

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