



THRILL OF A LIFETIME—Charlie Conacher (left), one of hockey's all-time greats, made Ted Kennedy, Toronto Maple Leaf right-winger, a happy boy yesterday when he turned over his old number, 9, for Ted to use from here in. Conacher had been Kennedy's hockey idol for years and as an amateur Ted always wore No. 9 because "that's Charlie's number."

Ted Kennedy 'Inherits' Chuck Conacher's No. 9

By ALLAN NICKLESON

The clean-cut kid with the cropped, curly hair clutched the blue and white sweater with the big No. 9 on the back, said almost with awe:

"I'll do my best to be worthy of it."

The giant of a man who had handed it to him, smoothed the greying hairs at his temples with a brawny hand, said facetiously:

"You should have a great year, kid, with this number on your back."

Then the giant, Charlie Conacher, now 37, gave the kid, Ted (Teeter) Kennedy, a crushing handshake—and an informal ceremony that had been beyond Ted's wildest flights of imagination was over. His idol, the great hockey master of another day, had presented him with the No. 9 that Conacher bore back in the rushing 30's with Toronto Maple Leafs, had told him it was his to wear.

Conacher Kennedy's Idol

It happened yesterday in the Leaf dressing room at Maple Leaf Gardens to a background of hockey equipment being unpacked from moth balls for another National League season. It came about because of a feverish-like hero worship Kennedy has had for Charlie since he was a lad of 8 or 9.

Kennedy, at 20, one of the most promising right wingers to show with the Leafs since Conacher patrolled the same boards, always had worn No. 9 — in deference to his hero—in such amateur sports as the hockey and football he played as a schoolboy in Port Colborne and his adjoining village of Humberstone. He was ready to fight anyone who questioned his claim.

But when he came to Leafs at

the tail-end of the 1943 season and played just two games, Lorne Carr had that number and a mere rookie didn't dare suggest a switch. He wore No. 10, later changed to 12.

The Leafs kidded Kennedy about his apparent fetish but the desire remained so great the Toronto management decided to do something about it after Carr retired last spring. Conacher agreed to the "deal," took time off yesterday from his brokerage duties to complete the "transaction."

"He's a good kid and a great player," said Conacher, who scored an even 200 goals in 8½ seasons with the Leafs. "You just can't disappoint a guy like that and it makes me feel good to do it."

Never Saw Conacher Play

Kennedy never saw his hero in an NHL game, didn't even meet him until he joined the Leafs from Port Colborne Seniors of the Ontario Hockey Association — and by that time, of course, Charlie had retired. But he read avidly every word of Conacher's feats, did his best to emulate them. His best was so good he jumped directly from juvenile to senior ranks, played one season of senior under Nels (Old Poison) Stewart, then came to Leafs.

He'll be starting his fourth full season with the Toronto club this fall, gives Stewart credit for "teaching me most of my hockey." In his first two full seasons here he scored 55 goals and counted 48 assists — amazing for a rookie. Last winter the injury bugaboo struck and he was in only 19 games.

"Gosh, a few years ago I never thought I would be playing for the Leafs, let alone wearing Charlie Conacher's sweater," Ted said after the presentation. "But I feel this is going to be a great year—especially now I've got old No. 9."