

So long Saddledome: Arena's last ride

As construction is set to begin on the new arena for 2024, we look back at the old barn's most iconic moments.



[Photograph of Scotiabank Saddledome]. (n.d.). Sports Team History. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://sportsteamhistory.com/calgary-flames>

The Scotiabank Saddledome has become an iconic fixture in the downtown Calgary skyline. Over its 27 years in operation, thousands of Calgarians have experienced Flames games, concerts, and other events. With the new arena on the horizon, and our next chapter set to begin we decided it was a great time to look back at the history of the great arena.

Saddledome is Built

In 1983, the idea for a new rink was born when the Atlanta Flames arrived in the city to officially become the Calgary Flames in 1980. With the NHL team's arrival, it became clear that the old Stampede Corral was not able to accommodate the large crowds.

During this time, Calgary was also desperately working to bring the Winter Olympics to its city. With this desire, and the need for a new home for the Calgary Flames, the city birthed the idea for a new rink. In the summer of 1981, the new arena was started. It was called the 'Calgary Coliseum' at the time but was renamed the 'Olympic Saddledome' before it was officially opened in 1983.

The 20,000-seat capacity and unique shape instantly created a fixture in Calgary's downtown. The International Olympic Committee also took note of the arena initiative and awarded Calgary the 1988 Olympics.

First event

The Calgary Flames were the first to hold an event in the new arena. Now a fixture in the Saddledome, the team opened with a battle of Alberta against the Edmonton Oilers. A close contest in front of 17,000 fans ended with the Oilers winning 4-3.

First concert

The first band to rock the new Olympic Saddledome was The Moody Blues. The band played their signature R&B music in late 1983 to officially christen the new arena. Stevie Ray Vaughan opened for the band. It was not the last time, as The Moody Blues would return on a 1987 world tour.

Home for the Stampede

With the arena's location in Stampede Park, the Saddledome was a natural choice to be used for the Calgary Stampede. The iconic festival has used the Saddledome for concerts, shows and even rodeo events since the arena was opened.

Professional Bull Riders Inc. has also hosted events in the Saddledome including Bud Light Cup events.

The Olympics arrive

In 1988, the Olympic Saddledome finally hosted its namesake. Calgary was the first Canadian city to ever host an Olympic Winter Games. During the '88 Olympics, the building hosted both the ice hockey and figure skating events. The rink was praised for its capacity and for being able to host an international sized rink. In men's hockey, the Soviet Union took home the gold, followed by Finland with the silver and Sweden with the bronze.

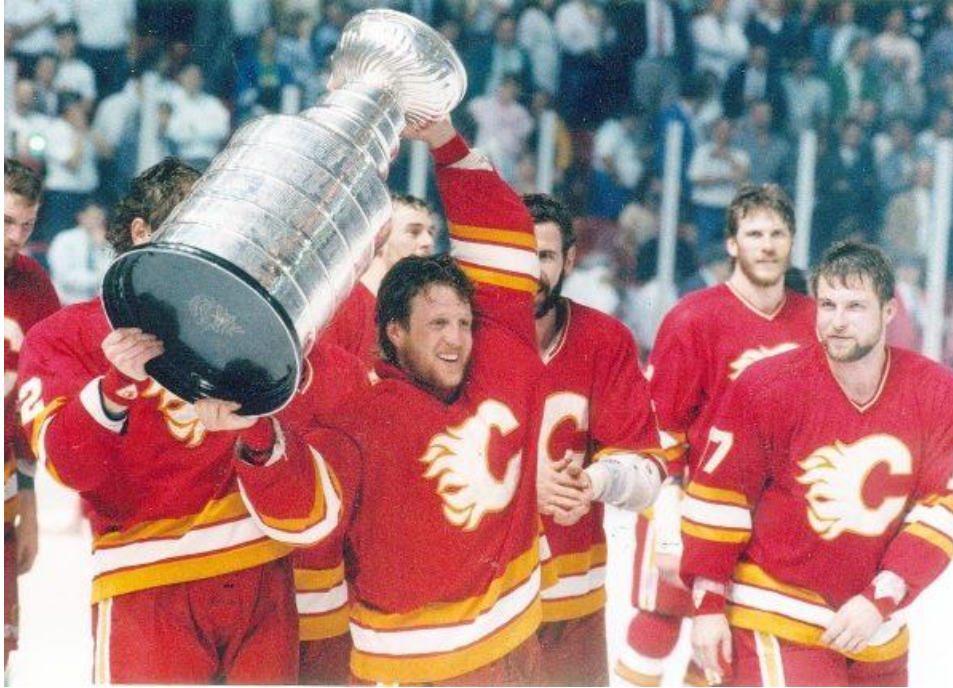


[Canada plays the Soviet Union at the '88 Olympics] (1988). The Associated Press. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympics/pyeongchang/ice-hockey/team-canada-mens-hockey-sean-burke-enjoy-the-experience-1.4529845>

Brian Boitano won the gold in men's ice dancing for the United States and Katarina Witt took home the gold in women's ice dancing for Germany. Overall, the Olympics were a smashing success and a great opportunity for the world to see the new Olympic Saddledome.

Flames bring home the championship

In 1989, just nine years after the Flames arrived from Atlanta, the team was able to bring home the Stanley Cup. It was their second trip to the finals, after losing to the Montreal Canadiens in 1986.



[Calgary Flames Hoist the Stanley Cup in 1989]. (n.d.). Sports Team History. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://sportsteamhistory.com/calgary-flames>

The cup was not won on home ice, as they defeated the Canadiens in Montreal; however, the Flames won three of the six games needed in the Saddledome. It was a monumental moment as the Flames brought the cup back to Calgary.

Massive renovations

In 1994, the Calgary Flames Limited Partnership took over management of the Saddledome. The group sought to add luxury suites and a new club section to the arena. In the fall of '94, the group immediately launched a renovation that ended up costing \$37 million.

One year later, the new arena was unveiled. Country superstar Reba McEntire was the first to perform in the newly renovated venue and was welcomed by a sold-out crowd. Days later, the arena had an official ceremony at the Calgary Flames season opener.

Hitmen & Roughnecks

The Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League (WHL) are one of the other residents of the Saddledome. The major junior club was formed in 1994, and they were bought by the Calgary Flames in

1997. Through the years, the Hitmen have won two Western Hockey League championships and seen 42 players go on to play in the NHL.

The Calgary Roughnecks of the National Lacrosse League (NLL) also call the Saddledome home. The Roughnecks were founded in 2002 and have won three league championships.

The flood

In June 2013, the Bow and Elbow Rivers flooded many parts of Calgary, including the Saddledome. The arena flooded up to the eighth row and the event level of the facility was destroyed. The locker rooms and control rooms were swamped.



[Photograph of swamped Saddledome]. (n.d.). Calgary Flames. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/saddledome-s-nerve-centre-a-total-loss-to-floods-flames-report-1.1337585>

Construction crews worked hard to get the facility event ready in just two months. The Saddledome reopened on Sep. 11, 2013, with an Eagles concert. It was an amazing feat, and truly exemplified the city's grit to emerge from the flooding stronger.

The Saddledome today

Now known as the Scotiabank Saddledome, the arena continues to play host to the Flames, Roughnecks, Hitmen, as well as various concerts and events.

The new Calgary Event Centre is set to begin construction in 2021 with a tentative opening date set for some time in 2024. The Scotiabank Saddledome will most likely be demolished at that time.

Whether COVID-19 restrictions allow us to attend another event at the Saddledome is yet to be seen, but the saddle-shaped arena will always hold a big place in Calgary's history.

References

- [Calgary Flames Hoist the Stanley Cup in 1989]. (n.d.). Sports Team History. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://sportsteamhistory.com/calgary-flames>
- Calgary Flames. (2020). *Team History*. <https://www.nhl.com/flames/team/history>
- Calgary Hitmen. (2020). *Hitmen History*. <https://hitmenhockey.com/hitmen-history-2>
- Calgary Roughnecks. (2020). *Team History*. <https://calgaryroughnecks.com/our-history/>
- [Canada plays the Soviet Union at the '88 Olympics] (1988). The Associated Press. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympics/pyeongchang/ice-hockey/team-canada-mens-hockey-sean-burke-enjoy-the-experience-1.4529845>
- Cody Snyder Bullbustin. (2020). *Events*. <http://www.codysnyderbullbustin.com/events.html>
- Hockey Reference. (2020). *1983-84 Calgary Flames Schedule and Results*. https://www.hockey-reference.com/teams/CGY/1984_games.html
- Olympics. (n.d.). *Calgary 1988*. <https://olympic.ca/games/1988-calgary/>
- [Photograph of Scotiabank Saddledome]. (n.d.). Sports Team History. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://sportsteamhistory.com/calgary-flames>
- [Photograph of swamped Saddledome]. (n.d.). Calgary Flames. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/saddledome-s-nerve-centre-a-total-loss-to-floods-flames-report-1.1337585>
- Scotiabank Saddledome. (2019-a). *Building History*. Retrieved October 8, 2020, from <https://www.scotiabanksaddledome.com/building-info>
- Scotiabank Saddledome. (2019-b). *General Information*. Retrieved October 8, 2020, from <https://www.scotiabanksaddledome.com/building-info>
- Seatgeek TBA. (2013, April). *Scotiabank Saddledome: Where Calgary goes to rock out*. <https://seatgeek.com/tba/music/scotiabank-saddledome-concerts-tickets-seating/>
- Sports Team History. (2020). *Calgary Flames*. <https://sportsteamhistory.com/calgary-flames>
- The Canadian Press. (2013, June 22). *Saddledome's nerve centre 'a total loss' to floods, Flames report*. CTV. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/saddledome-s-nerve-centre-a-total-loss-to-floods-flames-report-1.1337585>