



Maple Leaf Gardens, on Carlton Street in Toronto, is one of the great hockey arenas of the world and seems an improbable place to find a seamy sex scandal.

(TIBOR KOLLEY/The Globe and Mail)

Scandal slams Gardens into the boards

BY JOHN GRAY
The Globe and Mail

TORONTO — Police charged a veteran usher at Maple Leaf Gardens yesterday with sexually abusing young boys, but the men who run the Gardens continued to protest that it was not their business to warn the police that a pedophile ring might be operating in hockey's most famous arena.

John Paul Roby was charged with six counts of indecent assault and five counts of gross indecency after police took statements from six men who alleged that the usher molested them

during the 1970s and 1980s at the Gardens and elsewhere.

Earlier this week, George Stuckless, 47, a former part-time Gardens employee, was charged with indecent assault and gross indecency against Martin Kruze — allegedly an exchange of sex for tickets to hockey games and other special events at the Gardens.

The arrest of Mr. Stuckless effectively blew the lid off a secret that until now has been secure within Maple Leaf Gardens and the private demons of past victims.

By yesterday afternoon Metro Toronto Police had secured statements from almost two dozen men who alleged that they were molested as teen-

agers by men who worked at the Gardens.

Most of them mentioned George Hannah, an equipment manager for the Toronto Marlboros, a now-defunct junior team, who was a Gardens employee until his death 13 years ago.

A police spokeswoman said not all of the incidents described by the newly

discovered victims had occurred in the Gardens. But, she said, "I think that's where the initial contacts were made."

The huge Gardens building on Carlton Street seems an improbable place to find a seamy sex scandal. It is one of the great hockey arenas of the world — for Canadians, at least, a kind of shrine — and its corridors are filled

with photographs and mementos of the greatest players of the game.

It was from the newly constructed Gardens that Foster Hewitt began his first national radio broadcasts of games in 1932 and made the Gardens, the Toronto Maple Leafs and himself into national institutions.

But after the shock of the charges this week, it slowly became clear that there had been warnings before that all was not as it should have been at Maple Leaf Gardens.

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A warning of widespread sexual abuse involving young boys and employees of the Gardens was delivered four years ago to Gardens president Cliff Fletcher. Instead of advising the police, Mr. Fletcher turned the matter over to the Gardens' lawyers.

The warning came in a letter from Susan Vella, then lawyer for Mr. Kruze, whose complaints of sexual abuse between 1975 and 1982 were the first allegation of a pedophile ring operating in the Gardens.

Ms. Vella's letter left little to the imagination, yet the Gardens treated it as a demand for \$1-million, a matter to be handled by lawyers, despite the grave accusations brought against Gardens employees past and present.

"The incidents of abuse included oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, unwanted touching, fondling and kissing," she wrote. "Furthermore, Mr. Kruze was one of a number of boys who was induced into engaging in group sex with [George Hannah] and other employees of Maple Leaf Gardens Limited."

Ms. Vella, who was seeking \$1-million for Mr. Kruze, says her client was concerned that what happened to him "not be repeated today by current employees and management" at the Gardens.

"As part of the settlement, Mr. Kruze would be pleased to discuss his knowledge concerning the past events of sexual assault and sexual abuse" to ensure they are not repeated, the letter says, warning: "There is some cause for concern that these events may be ongoing today."

Mr. Fletcher made it clear yesterday that he passed the letter on to Garden's lawyers and washed his hands quickly of the affair.

From the lawyers, the letter went to an insurance company and to a claims investigator, who Mr. Fletcher said "felt there were no other parties — if there was anything at all."

As Mr. Fletcher explained it: "And the report was that it was felt that at worst it was an isolated incident had taken place years prior to the settlement time . . . and that the issue was dead, the issue was closed."

This article was written by John Gray, based on reporting by Murray Campbell James Christie Michael Grange Henry Hess William Houston Robert McLeod
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