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**Willie O'Ree's Longtime Contributions to the Sports World to be Remembered**



*Willie O'Ree, a man who's become a hockey legend despite playing only 45 games in two seasons for the Boston Bruins in 1958, and then again in 1960-61*

By Ron Wynn

Sometimes an athlete can make an enormous contribution to a sport despite having a limited playing career. One great example of that is Willie O'Ree, a man who's become a hockey legend despite playing only 45 games in two seasons for the Boston Bruins in 1958, and then again in 1960-61. O'Ree was the first Black player in NHL history, and he reached the league despite having been blinded in one eye by an errant puck. But O'Ree didn't let anything stop his quest, overcoming both physical disability and racist treatment from fans and players, including physical attacks from opponents.

Today the 86-year-old O'Ree has been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame, had his number retired by the Bruins, been given Can-

ada's highest civilian honor the Order of Canada, and been named vice-president of diversity efforts for the NHL.

Still he received perhaps his highest honor last week. The House cleared a bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Willie O'Ree, the first Black man to play in the NHL. Lawmakers passed the measure by a vote of 426-0, after the Senate previously passed it by unanimous consent in July. The legislation, which now heads to President Biden's desk, awards the Congressional Gold Medal "in recognition of his extraordinary contributions and commitment to hockey, inclusion, and recreational opportunity."

"Blind in 1 eye and a victim of racism at times throughout his career, O'Ree persevered and played professional hockey for 22 years, tallying over 1,000 points," the measure states. "Willie O'Ree was a young and fast left winger. But he could not out-skate the racist backlash in response to his desegregating the National Hockey League. As the sole Black player in the NHL at the time, Willie endured

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