

The Cape Cod Coliseum: All You Need To Know :: Reader View

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The Coliseum when it was open. Photo courtesy of Todd Kennelly.

For over seventy years the Cape Cod Melody Tent has been the preeminent music and entertainment location on the peninsula. Since opening in 1950, as the Cape Cod Music Circus, the Tent has hosted countless world class musicians, comedians, and more. It has had tremendous success. However for a little over a decade there was a place that matched the Melody Tent act for act. There was a place that at times might have even surpassed it in terms of entertainment attractions. That place was the Cape Cod Coliseum and its legend is still strong today.

The Cape Cod Coliseum opened in September 1972. It was a 46,000-square foot concrete arena which sat between 5,000-6,500 people and cost \$1.5 million to build. Owned by Yarmouth real estate agent William Harrison, and managed by Richard 'Bud' Terrio, the Coliseum would initially makes waves as a location for ice hockey, both youth and amateur.

Terrio would gain notoriety as the man who helped create the Cape Cod Cubs. The Cubs would debut in the Eastern Hockey League in time for the 1972-73 season with Terrio serving as the team's first president. Many local youth hockey organizations would be encouraged to sign up for ice time, filling out much of the Coliseum's schedule during its first season in business.

The first event at the Coliseum was a game between the Boston Braves and Rhode Island Reds of the American Hockey League on

September 27, 1972. The Braves were the affiliate of the NHL's Boston Bruins, while the Reds were the affiliate of the New York Rangers.



The Coliseum today, it is a warehouse for Dennis East International. Photo courtesy of Chris Setterlund.

The next spring the Coliseum would begin attracting musical entertainment. It would be converted into an auditorium capable of holding 6,500 people when the Boston Pops paid a visit in April 1973. So anticipated was this performance that traffic was backed up all the way from the Coliseum entrance to the off ramps of the Mid-Cape Highway a mile away. Not to mention eyewitness accounts of people parking along the highway and scaling the fence to see the show as well.

As the 1970's went on some of the biggest names in music would grace the stage inside the concrete cube. Artists such as ZZ Top, KISS, Foreigner, Styx, Black Sabbath, Van Halen, Grateful Dead, Heart, Rush, and Santana would travel to the little village of South Yarmouth to play for ravenous fans at the Coliseum. However as successful as the arena was, turmoil was just below the surface.

Early in 1974 the Coliseum was put up for sale at a value of \$2.5 million. The Cape Cod Cubs attendance numbers were not doing well drawing an average of 2,000-2,800 fans per game when the arena could hold just over 5,000 for hockey. In February 1975 the building would actually close for twenty-four hours. A permanent closure was averted when an agreement was made with Bass River Savings Bank to keep operations going. This was in large part due to support from the community and youth hockey.

The Cubs would be rechristened the Cape Codders for the 1974-75 season. The writing was on the wall though. Despite efforts to raise

the funds needed to save it the team would fold in 1977. The year before original owner William Harrison would file for bankruptcy and the arena was then bought by Ed Fruean.

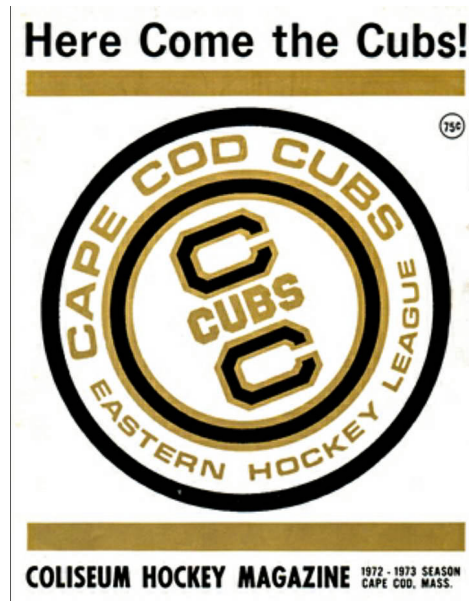


Photo from the Coliseum Hockey Magazine featuring the Cape Cod Cubs from the 1972-1973 season. Photo courtesy of Todd Kennelley.

Fruean would own the Coliseum for three years before its most well known owner would take over. Vince McMahon, the owner of World Wrestling Entertainment, agreed to take over the mortgage payments for the Coliseum from Ed Fruean using the profits made from events run there to pay it. Ironically it was in the Coliseum offices that McMahon's ascent to the worldwide leader in sports entertainment began. He would change the regional World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF) to the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) and create Titan Sports in South Yarmouth.

Wrestling events had been a staple of the Cape Cod Coliseum since the beginning with stars like Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, Bob Backlund, Sgt. Slaughter, and others entertaining fans inside the concrete walls. In addition to wrestling, concerts, and hockey there were other unique events which took place at the Coliseum. These included the roller derby, Sesame Street Live On-Ice, and a visit from the Boston Lobsters. They were a World Team Tennis organization led by Wimbledon Champion Martina Navratilova and owned by a young Robert Kraft.

The Cape Cod Coliseum would continue to bring in big time acts as the decade turned to the 1980's. Aerosmith, Def Leppard, The Clash, Talking Heads, and Iron Maiden mixed established artists with up and coming stars plying their trade inside the arena. While the concerts, hockey, and other events did well Vince McMahon's WWF took pro wrestling to an entirely new level. His interest in running the Coliseum waned. McMahon would sell the building to Christmas Tree Shops in 1984 who would turn it into a warehouse. Fittingly the final event held at the Cape Cod Coliseum was a World Wrestling

Federation card on June 4, 1984 with Sgt. Slaughter being the final person to ever entertain people inside its walls.

In the three decades since its closing the Cape Cod Coliseum has become but a footnote in history. The Melody Tent has continued uninterrupted success bringing in famous acts to perform during the summer. When one passes by the former Coliseum the outline of its name is still visible on the façade, otherwise all that remains of this brilliant flash of light are the memories held dear by so many longtime Cape Codders.

By Christopher Setterlund