

NEWSFLASH

March 10, 1955

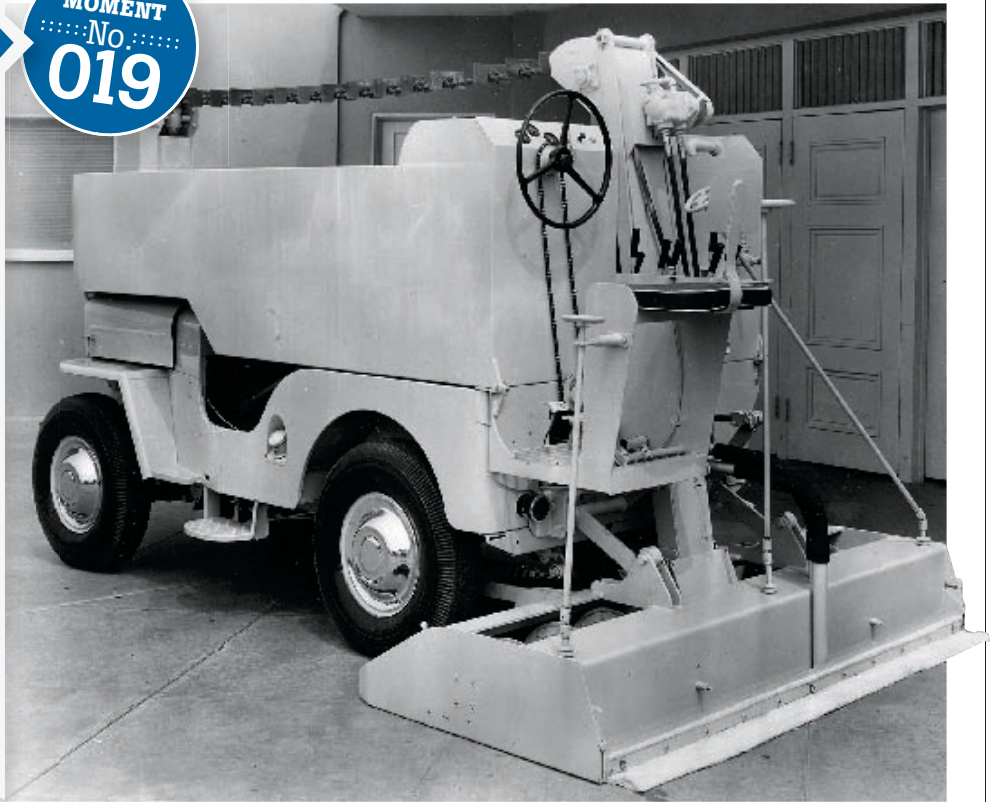
☞ TORONTO - Hockey fans at Maple Leaf Gardens were treated to a strange sight when a bizarre machine drove out onto the ice between periods.

The odd contraption will soon be seen in all NHL arenas, as teams are adopting the strange-looking vehicle that promises to revolutionize the tedious job of resurfacing the ice.

The machine is a modified Jeep that scrapes loose snow off the top surface of the rink and lays down hot water to form a smooth surface.

Up until now, a group of men armed with shovels scraped down the roughened surface after each period. Then, another rink employee pulled a barrel of steaming water over the surface to form fresh ice.

IMPACT
MOMENT
No. 019



Most Zambonis still look like this early 1954 model.

SMOOTH AS ICE EVERY TIME

BY TOM TIMMERMANN



OH, HOW HOCKEY'S HISTORY WOULD have been different if the man who created the perfect ice-resurfacing machine had been named something like Ralph Cooper. Or Carl Needham. Or Max Monroe.

The man's name was Frank Zamboni, a moniker you couldn't make up if you hired a team of marketing whizzes. His creation, the Zamboni ice-resurfacing machine, is an amazing collection of form and function, an awkward looking contraption that gracefully moves across the ice, scraping up the old, putting down the new, as it creates the clean sheet of ice that players so covet.

And it's all topped with a name both elegant and exotic, a name that suggests a man with a cape and maybe a sword, or maybe a human cannonball. Would it work if it was called the Monroe? Not a chance.

Teams can trot out all sorts of activities during intermissions – puck-shooting contests, musical chairs, you name it – but there is nothing quite as mesmerizing as the Zamboni making its rounds on the ice, gliding through the corners at a parade-like 9 mph. Songs have been written about the Zamboni, children look admiringly at it the same way they do fire engines. And their parents aren't ashamed to watch it, either. Teams have contests with a ride on the Zamboni as the prize. Deep down, everyone wants to drive a Zamboni, just once.

No other sport has something like the Zamboni. Baseball fans don't wait for the tarp to cover the field, basketball fans don't get excited about the mops that come out to wipe up the sweat after a player falls down. But the Zamboni takes to the ice and weaves its magic. A third intermission? Yes, if we can see the Zamboni again.

This is not to disrespect the role the Zamboni plays in the game, to treat it as if it were a magazine pin-up rather than a serious actress. Let hockey players skate around for 20 minutes, and the playing surface becomes rutted and scratched. Late in periods, passes no longer go in straight lines. Skaters, for that matter, may not go in straight lines. Snow begins to build up on the ice, creating tiny hills that pucks have to overcome.

But 15 minutes later, after the Zamboni has done its stuff, the ice is smooth and glacial again,

perfect for skating and firing pin-point passes. A power play at the start of a period is ever so more dangerous than a power play at the end of the period.

That clean sheet of ice is just one more weapon for a skilled man-advantage situation.

The Zamboni was born after the Second World War – in, of all places, Southern California – when Mr. Zamboni, trying to find a way to quickly resurface his rink, built a successful machine after several attempts. But it didn't hit the public consciousness until the 1950s, when Sonja Henie purchased one for her ice revue that toured the United States. Everywhere she went, people marveled at the Zamboni.

The Zamboni has become as much a part of hockey as pucks and sticks. It stands in a pantheon of the game's greatest names: Gretzky. Lemieux. Howe. Zamboni. |