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## Calgary hockey poet mourns lost NHL season in 'NH Elegy' to Stanley Cup

**Judy Monchuk**  
Canadian Press

Wednesday, April 06, 2005

CALGARY (CP) - On the eve of the NHL playoffs that will not be, hockey poet Richard Harrison has written a lament for the lost season.

"Now it hits home," says Harrison, whose bittersweet NH Elegy could speak for millions of fans who would ordinarily be drafting playoff pools and cheering on their favourite team in the quest for the Stanley

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Cup. An elegy mourns the death of a friend and Harrison says that's how many Canadians view NHL hockey.

And while he understands that people have gone on with their lives and found something else to fill the void, he says most Canadians are feeling a twinge of remorse for what should be happening in April.

"There must some internal clock that says 'Time to play the big, serious game, where everything is dropped in place of winning'," said the Toronto-born Harrison, an award-winning poet who was shortlisted for the Governor General's award in 2000. His collection of hockey poetry Hero of the Play was recently re-released marking its 10th anniversary.

"I certainly have a space where I was expecting to see a playoff run."

A year ago Thursday, the Calgary Flames began their magical and improbable run to the Stanley Cup final. Today, the 100,000 car flags with the flaming C are a distant memory, the city is no longer draped in a sea of red jerseys.

"I think we're truly grieving something and dealing with the loss of something that's symbolically important to us," said Harrison, a creative writing teacher at Mount Royal College in Calgary. "We're supposed to keep the flag flying, we're supposed to keep hockey going."

Harrison's 101-word poem sums up the frustration of many who can't comprehend that their game has become big business, that the tradition of playing the Stanley Cup has been halted over money.

"Today, left idle in the Hall of Fame,  
while rich men quarrel to no profit at its base,  
untouched upon its plinth it stands.

And all who see it can tell you now  
how a fallen thing is one that no one holds."




The poem was published Wednesday by Victoria-based Internet bookseller Abebooks.com. The poem completes Harrison's trilogy of poetry on the Stanley Cup.

"To me, the image of the Stanley Cup has always been raised, it's always been a symbol of triumph," he said. "But it becomes a fallen thing when no one picks it up. Here it is, still standing and yet we've let it down, we've let this season die."







Radio host Rob Kerr, whose Overtime call-in show during the Flames playoff run would stay on the air until no one wanted to talk anymore, says there is a sense of loss for die-hard fans who are now getting their hockey fix debating suggested rule changes or following junior hockey playoffs.

Although the Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League have shattered attendance records, attracting some 16,000 fans to games in the first round of the playoffs, many Flames fans have just moved on.

"The double cancellation of the season was probably the pinnacle of interest for most people," said Kerr, referring to the frenzied weekend in February where hockey legends Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux tried to get owners and players to reach an agreement after NHL commissioner Gary

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Bettman called off the season.

"That was as hot as it got," said Kerr, noting that fans no longer call and e-mail for up-to-the-moment updates for meetings.

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Here's the poem lamenting the loss of the NHL season, written by award-winning poet Richard Harrison:


### **NH Elegy**

Once, men came home from war,  
or from the sides of family graves,  
to lace up skates and play for it  
as if everything could be remade  
in a silver bowl passed hand to hand.  
For years it etched the seasons  
with their winning names,  
and took the touch of triumph  
into each triumphant house. It paused  
just once to mourn the dead, and  
stayed unmarked to mark their passing.  
Today, left idle in the Hall of Fame,  
while rich men quarrel to no profit at its base,  
untouched upon its plinth it stands.  
And all who see it can tell you now  
how a fallen thing is one that no one holds.

Richard Harrison

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