

# Willie O'Ree (born October 15, 1935, in Fredericton)

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The youngest of 13, Willie O'Ree's family was only one of two Black families in Fredericton. His grandparents had come up through the Underground Railway. Mr. O'Ree started playing hockey at the age of 3 (Freeborn, 2016). In 1955, he suffered a severe eye injury that would have seen him blocked from playing in the NHL. However, he kept his injury a secret and became the first Black player in the National Hockey League in 1957 with the Boston Bruins. He retired in 1979 and was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in November of 2018. Mr. O'Ree's impact on hockey is marked with racist experiences that at one point he stated he was "lucky to get out of the arena alive" (Willie O'Ree, 2022, para. 3). That did not stop him from playing the sport he loved. In 2008, he was appointed to the Order of Canada and in January 2021 the Boston Bruins retired his number (Willie O'Ree, 2022).

## Reference

Freeborn, J. (2016). Willie O'Ree: Canadian hockey player. In *Britannica*.  
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