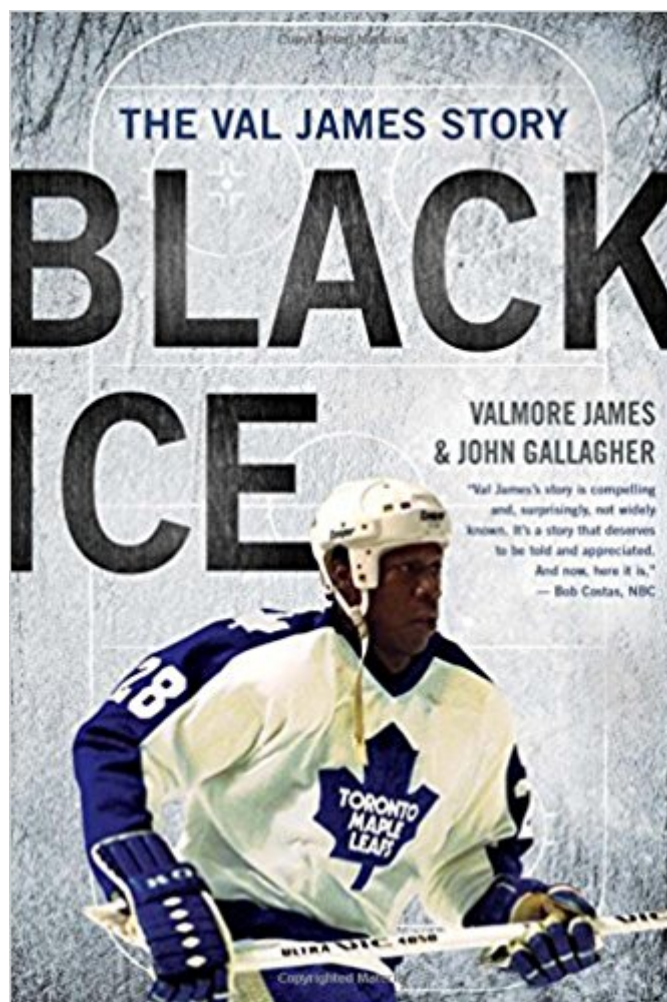


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# Black Ice: The Val James Story



## Synopsis

The first black American in the NHL tells his storyVal James became the first African American player in the NHL when he took to the ice with the Buffalo Sabres in 1982, and in 1987 he became the first black player of any nationality to skate for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Born in central Florida, James grew up on Long Island and received his first pair of skates for his 13th birthday. At 16, James left home to play in Canada, where he was the only black person in junior and, often, in the whole town. While popular for his tough play and winning personality, the teenager faced racist taunts at opposing arenas, and the prejudice continued at all levels of the game. In his two NHL stints, James defined himself as a smart team player and opponent, known for his pugilistic skills. *Black Ice* is the untold story of a trail-blazing athlete who endured and overcame discrimination to realize his dreams and become an inspiration for future generations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James became the first American-born black player in the N.H.L. playing for the Buffalo Sabres. Willie O'Ree, a Canadian, broke the N.H.L. color barrier in 1958, but James was the seventh over the next 24 years. He played between 1978 and 1988, 14 games in two years in the NHL for the Sabres and Maple Leafs; later he was an enforcer, mainly in the American Hockey League. James wrote the book with John Gallagher, also from Long Island and a former New York City police officer who is a federal prosecutor in Philadelphia. The book describes the terrible indignities that he suffered at the hands of fans, not only opponents but fans of his own team. After a game in Boston in 1982, for example, fans blocked the team bus, threw a beer bottle into the windshield, called

James a vile name and demanded he come out. James headed for the door until Coach Scotty Bowman ordered him back to his seat. According to Warren Skorodenski, a Springfield Indians goalie reported Springfield fans yelling racial slurs at James and throwing so many bananas on the ice that linesmen collected them during stoppages of play. A few fans, he said, dressed in Ku Klux Klan-style hoods. "It was disgusting. To be in his shoes, I just couldn't imagine." According to news reports, his wife could not finish the book. She thought she knew his early history, but he never shared the experience for fear of upsetting her. It took a long time for James to be able to write this book: "I had to deal with it in my own mind, and pretty much forgive. That's the only word that comes close to it. Just to cleanse my own mind of it all, and to think.

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