

DISCUSSING THE OUTDOOR GAME, CHARITIES AND SUCCESS WITH KINGS PRESIDENT LUC ROBITAILLE

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 12, 2013

Following their inception in 1967, the Los Angeles Kings have had many of hockey's best don their uniform. Hall-of-Famers like Terry Sawchuk, Marcel Dionne and Wayne Gretzky have all once called Los Angeles home in addition to the likes of team legends Rogie Vachon, Dave Taylor and Daryl Evans. As extensive as the list of former Kings are, no player has been more synonymous with the Los Angeles Kings than Luc Robitaille who, after spending the majority of his playing career with the club, was named their President of Business Operations in 2007.

I had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Robitaille about the Kings' transformation into one of the NHL's elite contenders, his thoughts on his team's much-anticipated outdoor game at Dodger Stadium as well as some of his charity work, including with his own foundation, *Echoes of Hope*.

First off, I asked Mr. Robitaille how it had been watching the Kings gradually converted into an elite championship contender, ultimately winning the Stanley Cup in 2012.

"It's been an amazing ride," Robitaille began. "We took our time and rebuilt our team we filled the right way and then to get to that playoff series where everything seems to come the right way. To winning the Stanley Cup after waiting 45 years, it has certainly been an amazing ride and it was something pretty special. It was a memorable moment, that's for sure."

For many players drafted in the ninth round, discouragement is inevitable, even overbearing. That boyhood dream of playing in the NHL may seem too insurmountable to achieve. Though whatever negativity that comes with being drafted so late, no one bothered to tell Luc Robitaille.

Drafted in the ninth round (171st overall) of the 1984 Draft, Robitaille's dream never wavered. Coming off an 85-point junior season with the QMJHL's Hull Olympiques, Robitaille's determination to make the NHL only grew – and exponentially at that. In 64 games in 1984-85, Robitaille set the QMJHL on fire scoring 55 goals and adding 93 assists for inconceivable total of 148 points. The following season, in what was his final junior campaign, was, believe it or not, even better, scoring 68 goals in 63 games while adding an unfathomable 123 assists for 191 points. Robitaille's numbers were more than enough to show that he belonged in the National Hockey League – and the Kings agreed, calling the 20-year-old up for the start of the 1986-87 season. Whether anyone knew it at the time or not, fans in southern California were about to

welcome who would become not only one of the greatest players in their team's history but in hockey history.

When the Los Angeles Kings raised his No. 20 to the rafters of the Staples Center in 2007 and even when he was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2009, I asked Robitaille how he looked back on his career in Los Angeles after said events.

"From the day I stepped foot here, I felt that I was part of this franchise deep in my heart," Robitaille told me. "And I just feel fortunate that I'm now in my late-40s and I'm still involved with the game I love and just being able to do things every day that touches the sport and the franchise I love so much."

Turning our attention away from the Kings, I asked Mr. Robitaille about some of his charity work including *March of Dimes Canada*, an organization I am personally involved with, as well as his own charity.

Founded in 1951, *March of Dimes Canada* was formed to raise funds to support research into finding a cure for polio. Over the years, the non-profit organization has branched out to help people of all physical disabilities enhance their independence and community participation through a wide range of programs and services across Canada.

I asked Mr. Robitaille to elaborate on what motivated him and his family to become involved with March of Dimes Canada.

"It's a great foundation. You can really make a direct connection and you can make a difference," Robitaille enthusiastically pointed out. "But to tell you the truth, for me and my wife and even my kids, we'll support foundations that we know the people that work for it are doing it for the right reasons and March of Dimes is no doubt like that.

"I think any time we have an opportunity to give back a little bit, why not? That's what we live this life for. If we can help each other, I think it's a lot of fun. It makes it more fun to do what we get to do and live our dream."

In addition, Mr. Robitaille and his wife Stacia formed their own charity which I had the chance to ask the Hall-of-Famer about.

"When Hurricane Katrina happened, we realized there were a lot of families struggling in New Orleans and we helped a bunch of families restart their lives," Robitaille told me. "But throughout the process, we came across this problem where a lot of kids that are emancipated at 18, especially the ones that want to go to school or go to college, don't have any support to see it through.

"So since then, we formed a foundation called Echoes of Hope and we work with kids who are foster youths, some of them you can call them at-risk youth, and we make sure that, first of all, they've got to go to school and then they're applying for college, moving forward, getting jobs and so forth. We want to make sure there's someone there saying, 'Hey, we're here and we're going to help you. Let's see it through,' because a lot of them never had a parent or they've never had a mentor so at least just help them. Every one of us has had someone help us at one point in our lives and a lot of kids, when they turn 18, they've got no one to turn to. So, we make sure they can turn to Echoes of Hope, some of us who are involved with the foundation can help them."

One of *Echoes of Hope's* most popular events is the *Luc Robitaille Celebrity Shootout* which is held every January in Park City, UT and some its participants include Kings fan favourites Ian Laperriere and Marty McSorley in addition to *March of Dimes Canada* ambassador Alan Thicke. I asked Mr. Robitaille to enlighten us on how the event was first created and how it's become so popular since.

"A friend of mine runs Sony Pictures Classics, Tom Bernard, and he loves hockey. Tom said, 'Look, I'd love for you to do a game there,' and he said 'I'll support you and help you,' and that's how it started six years ago," the Kings' president said. "I said we'll do a game and do it for Echoes of Hope, he's supported us and helped us over the years and that's how it started. It's grown every year and it's getting bigger every year and it's just a lot of fun for everyone."

For more information on Echoes of Hope whether you'd like to donate or find out more about their events, please be sure to visit www.echoesofhope.org today.

While 2013-14 marks the first full season since 2011-12, a new divisional format as well as NHLers once again competing in the Winter Olympics, this season will also introduce a series of outdoor games as part of the NHL's *Stadium Series* coming off the huge success of the *Winter Classic*. One of those outdoor games will be taking place at Los Angeles's Dodger Stadium where the hometown Kings will play host to their crosstown rivals, the Anaheim Ducks, on January 25.

I asked Mr. Robitaille the consensus among the Kings' staff and whether they were excited as the fans about the upcoming game as well as to elaborate on the steps the team is taking to ensure that the outdoor game will be a success.

"We're still working really hard. We think it's going to be one of the greatest moments for southern California hockey," Robitaille began. "Besides the Kings and the Ducks winning the Cup, this is going to be a huge moment for us to showcase the brand of hockey of both teams, both organizations. It's going to be

sold out. We're working really hard on building around it and there's a lot of vibe around the city, a lot of talk about it. So, it's going to be a lot of fun."

While many are excited for the outdoor game, there are those who are skeptical of the game's success wondering how the NHL can host an outdoor hockey game in the warm climate of Los Angeles. Mr. Robitaille was able to answer such concerns.

"The NHL has made huge strides in the last few years with the outdoor system. They bought a couple of different systems and they're really good at it," No. 20 told me. "We actually, for the last four years, have been doing an outdoor rink during the holidays here in LA and they're public sessions and we get 400 to 500 people an hour to skate and there's never been a problem.

"During the day, you have to be careful of the sun but when the sun goes down, it's not a big deal. It's basically the same system that's inside the buildings, inside the arenas, and they're just really good at making ice and it takes about a week to get it all done. There's a system to it but it's pretty simple and they've got it down to a good science."

With their acquisition of Wayne Gretzky in 1988, the Los Angeles Kings became an overnight sensation. But for the fans who had already been supporting the Kings, Luc Robitaille was what their team was all about. Even those converted fans from the Gretzky trade soon fell in love with No. 20. Not only could Lucky Luc produce offensively but when the aforementioned Great One went down to injury early in the 1992-93, it was Robitaille who took on the role of captain, leading the Kings to their first-ever Stanley Cup Final that spring. Despite not winning hockey's ultimate prize, fans in Los Angeles remained true to Robitaille, even during the brief periods he played elsewhere.

When he hung up his skates in 2006, Robitaille would look back on a career that saw him finish top-ten in league goal-scoring nine times, points-scoring four times, an all-star eight times including six-straight appearances at the All-Star Game from 1988 to 1993 and a league-best 24.8 shooting percentage in 1989-90. His 668 career goals not only make him the highest-scoring left-winger in NHL history but places him 12th on the league's all-time goal list, putting him in the same breath as the aforementioned Gretzky and Dionne in addition to the likes of Howe and Messier just to name four. For a player drafted so late, just making the NHL would have been vindicating enough – but not for Luc Robitaille. While making the jump to the front office may prove daunting for some, such wasn't the case for Robitaille who, with the help of (King's principal owner) Anschutz Entertainment Group, general manager Dean Lombardi and an exceptional scouting staff, guided the Los Angeles Kings to their first Stanley Cup crown leaving their fans all over the globe with long-awaited and much-deserved bliss.

In addition to delivering both on the ice and off for the Los Angeles Kings, those who have had the privilege to meet Mr. Robitaille only have the greatest things to say about the Hall-of-Famer. While fans of the silver-and-black love the likes of their current players whether it is Anze Kopitar, Jonathan Quick or Dustin Brown, it is clear from the plethora of No. 20 jerseys that still occupy many of the seats of Staples Center night after night that no one exemplifies such a proud, successful franchise more than Mr. Luc Robitaille.