

## REMINISCING WITH KINGS LEGEND IAN LAPERRIERE

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 5, 2014

“It’s not the size of the dog in the fight. it’s the size of the fight in the dog.”

Mark Twain’s iconic quote could not be more appropriate for anyone other than Los Angeles Kings legend Ian Laperriere.

On Saturday afternoon at 1pm PST (4pm EST), the Los Angeles Kings will look to continue their winning streak – as well as their shutout streak – as they play host to the Philadelphia Flyers.

From Dean Lombardi and John Stevens to Mike Richards and Jeff Carter to Wayne Simmonds and Brayden Schenn to Ron Hextall, the amount of people who worked for both organizations in any capacity is something that is rarely seen in professional sports. But Ian Laperriere will be making his return to STAPLES Center on Saturday as an assistant coach of the Flyers. While this certainly isn’t his first time back in the City of Angels as a member of the opposition, there is never any shortage of excitement when the former King does return.

A veteran of 16 NHL seasons, Laperriere spent nine of those with the Los Angeles Kings and, despite not being with the organization since 2004, he remains arguably the most popular fan favourite in town – and why not? During his time with the Kings, the Montreal native was known as a friendly, genuine member of the team’s community – a sharp contrast to his on-ice persona.

Early in his career, Laperriere developed a feistiness and intensity level matched by very few opposing players. At 6’1, 200 pounds, he may not have been the biggest combatant but Ian Laperriere was never afraid to drop the gloves while instilling motivation in his team that resulted in a quite a few come-from-behind wins or even a lasting message that he nor his team were not the least bit intimidated.

I had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Laperriere about his time in Los Angeles, his career transition from a player to coach, how he’s feeling these days and even his thoughts on a particular ex-teammate.

**Make Way for the Kings: You spent most of your career with the Los Angeles Kings. Despite not having played there since 2004, you remain a fan favourite as there are still plenty of Laperriere jerseys being worn to games at STAPLES Center. What does it mean to you to still be so popular in Los Angeles?**

Ian Laperriere: LA has a special place in my heart, even if I played for two other teams before going to LA. That’s the place I established myself as an NHL player. My relationship with the fans in LA was and is still

special. They supported me and embraced me the first day I got there and I'll never forget that.

**MW4TK: While in LA in 2001, you helped the Kings complete an opening-round upset of the Detroit Red Wings. How did that feel overall? How was the morale in the locker room and on the bench? And despite losing in the next round, you had the Colorado Avalanche on the ropes as well. How was that series for you and your team?**

IL: It was a special year. Playing against the great Detroit Red Wings was a big challenge for us. I felt we had a special team that year and always wondered if it wasn't for couple of our top player getting injured, if we could've beat the Avalanche. Just a special playoff.

**MW4TK: In 2005, teammate Jeremy Roenick was delivered a devastating hit by Phoenix's Denis Gauthier that sidelined him. In the wake of the hit, Sean Avery made an unfortunate comment about French players with visors. Understandably, you took exception to this. How was it being teammates with Sean Avery, both on the ice and in the locker room?**

IL: Yeah, the only thing I'll say about him is he was a good player and people pay too much attention to him.

**MW4TK: With the Flyers in the 2010 playoffs, you received a severe eye injury in addition to a mild concussion. The following training camp, while you weren't able to play due to post-concussion syndrome, you never gave up. Your perseverance was recognized so much that you won the Bill Masterton Trophy. Please tell us the highs of winning such an award but also of the hard decision to retire?**

IL: It was and still the toughest decision I made in my life. To leave the game I loved since I was three years old was devastating but, fortunately for me, Paul Holmgren, my GM at the time, offered me to stay in the game with the Flyers organization in different capacities. Winning the Masterton, I felt that it was a thank you coming from the media/writers for the great relationship I had with them over my 16-year career. To have Lucky (Luc Robitaille) handing me the trophy on stage was special, too. He's the person I looked up to since the day we were roommates with the Rangers. It was only one road trip. you'll have to ask him why (laughs).

**MW4TK: You are now the assistant coach of the Philadelphia Flyers. How have things been so far this season and what are your expectations not only this year but long term?**

IL: I really enjoy the ups and down of coaching (ups a lot more). Right now, we're still trying to find our identity. For the long term, I'm not sure. The way I see it, I'm learning every day and I go day by day and will see where it's going to take me.

**MW4TK: You showed off your acting skills in movies such as *This is 40* and *The Rocket*. In the latter,**

**you portrayed Hall-of-Famer Bernie Geoffrion. How did it feel portraying a player who, despite playing before your time, means so much to the Montreal Canadiens family?**

IL: For me growing up as a Montreal Canadiens fan, I knew who Bernie Geoffrion was and what he meant to the city/province I grew up in. It was a great experience and honor to play that role. This is 40 was great to see how Hollywood movies are made and much of the time, those actors and actresses spend on the set for only one scene. Lots of respect for them.

**MW4TK: Overall, how are you feeling these days after your eye injury and concussion?**

IL: Other than having blurry vision in my eye I feel very good physically . Ran couple half ironmans and a full one in 2013. With coaching, staying active keeps me sane mentally (smiles).

In 1992, he was drafted in the 7th round (158th overall) by the St. Louis Blues. While some players would be left feeling deterred from being chosen so late, Ian Laperriere was not.

The former Drummond Voltigeur was determined to make the National Hockey League and he did just that. Even when critics may have considered him merely a pest early on, Laperriere redeemed himself by developing into a reliable playmaker and an overall fine asset to whichever team he suited up for. Even when he arrived in Los Angeles, it was at a time when the team was at one of its lowest points as a franchise. Just weeks after trading away the greatest player in the world to ownership trouble off the ice, the Los Angeles Kings acquired Laperriere from the New York Rangers while another fan favourite in Marty McSorley and Hall-of-Famer Jari Kurri headed the other way. If Laperriere was expected to just be another name on a rebuilding team, he must have missed the memo.

While to some his 165 points pale in comparison to his 1,017 penalty minutes, Ian Laperriere contributions to the Kings are no less invaluable than Wayne Gretzky's. Yes, you read that correctly.

Laperriere's contributions not only to the Kings but to the NHL as a player are a throwback to Chris Nilan, Kenny Linseman, Stan Jonathan and even, of an earlier era, to "Terrible" Ted Lindsay. Each of those unsung heroes, like Laperriere, remain fan favourites to their respective teams – and for very good reason. In fact, Laperriere is so revered in Los Angeles that on February 23, 2013, the Kings honoured him as part of their Legends Night series – the first since winning their first Stanley Cup the previous June.

Like Dustin Brown today, Ian Laperriere was to the Los Angeles Kings a player anyone would love to have on their team but someone they'd despise if he was playing for the opposition – but only on the ice.

Overall, the one everyone affectionately refers to as "Lappy" took part in 1,083 NHL games, registered 336 points and a grand total of 1956 penalty minutes. But Laperriere's toughness wasn't limited to the ice.

After blocking a shot with his face in the 2010 playoffs, Ian Laperriere was sidelined indefinitely, but fought valiantly to return to the game he loved so much. While he didn't get the opportunity to play again, Laperriere never gave up. He worked as hard as anyone can imagine, fighting until every last option was no more. His tireless work ethic, as previously mentioned, led to winning himself the 2010-11 Bill Masterton Trophy, given to the player "who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey."

And here's a fun fact: When Martin Brodeur made his debut with the St. Louis Blues on Thursday, he joined Mr. Laperriere as the only players to play with both Peter and Paul Stastny. Thank you, Dan Marrazza.

A fearless competitor, a tireless contributor, a resilient athlete and a quality person. Fans, players and pundits alike can take their pick of which best describes Ian Laperriere best. Then again, there certainly isn't anything wrong with choosing all of the options – and many, if not all, would hold no reservation in doing just that.

Saturday's matinee may just be another game for the Los Angeles Kings on paper but when Lappy returns, whether for the first, second or 10th time, there is always something extra special in the air in and around STAPLES Center. Ian Laperriere just has that much of a legacy in Hollywood. It has lasted for a decade-plus already, and you can be sure that it will resonate for plenty more.