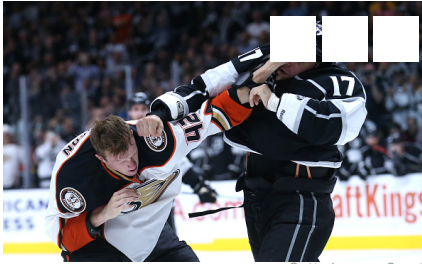


LA KINGS' MILAN LUCIC ALREADY TURNING SKEPTICS INTO BELIEVERS

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 October 2, 2015



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In a final tune-up before their annual **Frozen Fury** matchup, the **Los Angeles Kings** hosted the **Anaheim Ducks** at **STAPLES Center** this past Tuesday. Even when it's just the preseason, there is never any love lost between the two SoCal rivals and with the Ducks winning in Anaheim last Friday, the silver-and-black were looking to avenge said loss.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case as the Ducks won in overtime.

Of course, as tough as it is to lose to such a fierce rival — even if it is just the preseason — Kings fans did receive an auspicious introduction to their newest star.

At just under the six-minute mark of the second period on Tuesday, Anaheim's **Chris Wagner** was checked hard into the boards by **Milan Lucic**. Wagner's teammate, the 6-foot-3, 215-pound **Josh Manson**, did not take kindly to the hit, so he and Lucic decided to dance.

But this wasn't a quick episode with each player holding onto each others' jerseys before being split up. Lucic and Manson — son of former NHL heavyweight **Dave Manson** — dropped the gloves for a marathon, old-school fight where the two bobbed and weaved, threw a few haymakers and even separated themselves before embracing again. Never mind that it resembled some classic on-ice duels from 30-40 years ago but it took this writer back to the fierce rivalry that was **Marvin Hagler** and **Tommy Hearns**, minus the foot speed and, of course, the difference in weight class.

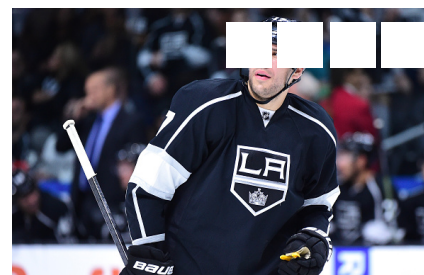


Acquired from Boston in June, Milan Lucic's arrival to Los Angeles was met with some excitement but also an exorbitant amount of reticence. After all, to get the former **Vancouver Giant**, the Kings traded promising defensive prospect Colin Miller, netminder **Martin Jones** and the 13th-overall pick in the **2015 Draft**. In addition, his history of antics on and off the ice has not exactly made Lucic a fan favourite.

As for those fans who were reluctant about his arrival, Lucic did not make his case any better in late August when, speaking with **TSN Radio 1410**, the 6-foot-3, 228-pounder said that not only does he dream of playing for his hometown team — who doesn't? — but that he would be “trying to make the most of” playing for the Kings. After all, Lucic is entering the final year of his contract.

But after Tuesday's game, Milan Lucic has found himself a slew of new supporters in Los Angeles. Even losing in overtime to the Ducks — with the winner scored by, of all players, **Corey Perry** — the defeat was largely a moot point thanks to Lucic's contributions.

“The Kings getting Milan Lucic, I think, was an excellent deal,” Kings' legendary broadcaster **Bob Miller** told me this summer. “I think his presence there because of his size, the physicality of the way he plays is going to open up a lot of room for (**Anze**) **Kopitar** and (**Marian**) **Gaborik**. So, I think it was a good deal.”



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Harry How

While skeptics of Lucic are certainly entitled to their feelings, there is so much that the 27-year-old brings to the table that it's near impossible not to love the guy.

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As discomfoting as it was to support a Kings club which had lost so many man-games to injury in the early-2000's, it has been reassuring to watch this team convert themselves into one of the healthiest in the NHL. Having missed a grand total of nine games over the last five seasons, Milan Lucic's addition only strengthens said reputation for the silver-and-black. But while his 18 goals and 26 assists was a personal decrease, Lucic has nonetheless proven that he is an asset on the ice, recording a +13 rating last season, adding to a career mark of +94. Just as importantly, Lucic dished out 259 hits last season — 17 more than Kings' leader **Dustin Brown** — to go along with 81 penalty minutes. The latter may not seem like the most significant stat but considering that he well eclipsed the 100-minute plateau in three of his first five seasons, Lucic has finished under triple digits in each of his last three seasons, signifying that he doesn't need to drop the gloves as often or even take costly penalties.

It may be dismissed by some as just a preseason game but Milan Lucic nonetheless used the opportunity on Tuesday to welcome himself to the Los Angeles Kings. Fans have yet to see what Lucic can do offensively — especially on a line with Kopitar and Gaborik — but that will come in due time. For now, Lucic's sheer toughness has already made some of his naysayers think twice about undermining the big man.

For fans who have been asking "Is it October yet?", they can stop wondering as it is finally here — and thanks to Milan Lucic, it is here with a vengeance.