

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM TOM LAIDLAW

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 January 24, 2017



Image credit: Ryan Cowley

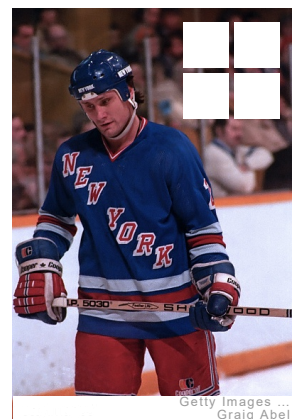
His arrival to Los Angeles marked the end of an era, or, rather, the beginning of a new one.

On March 10, 1987, the **Los Angeles Kings** had pulled off a trade with the **New York Rangers** that saw them part ways with their then-all-time leading scorer, **Marcel Dionne**. With that, it was the dawn of a new era in the City of Angels as the 35-year-old Dionne's exit paved the way for the beginning of a youth movement on a team which already included 20-something youngsters such as **Luc Robitaille**, **Steve Duchesne** and **Bernie Nicholls**. Plus, the Kings received two promising players from the Rangers in exchange for Dionne.

Bob Carpenter, a former first-round pick and a 50-goal scorer from just two seasons earlier, was the marquee player heading to Los Angeles in said trade. Along with Carpenter, though, was a 28-year-old defenseman by the name of **Tom Laidlaw**.

A native of Brampton, Ontario, Laidlaw, while as a sophomore at **Northern Michigan**, would be selected by the Rangers 93rd overall in the **1978 NHL Amateur Draft**. From there, Laidlaw would play two more seasons of collegiate hockey, during which time he **would be named** to the **CCHA First All-Star Team** twice as well as being chosen for the **NCAA Championship All-Tournament Team**.

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Then, in 1980, Laidlaw would join the Rangers where, for the next six-plus seasons, he would establish himself as a reliable stay-at-home blueliner who exhibited a great deal of poise and grit.

This would continue when Laidlaw was traded to the Kings as his new team expected him to continue to showcase his defensive strengths while jumping into the offensive rush whenever necessary. Laidlaw was also

never afraid to drop the gloves to stick up for a teammate or just to simply fire his squad up, reaching the 100-penalty-minute plateau three times in his career.

In this week's edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Tom Laidlaw, who shared with us his thoughts on being traded to Los Angeles, how he felt he helped the Kings and even his post-playing career as a player agent.

Laidlaw1



Make Way for the Kings: On March 10, 1987, you were traded to the Los Angeles Kings in a deal that would see Marcel Dionne head the other way to the New York Rangers. You had spent six-plus seasons with the Rangers for a defensive corps that included, among others, James Patrick and veteran Ron Greschner. Overall, describe your career with the Rangers. Were you immediately excited to join the Kings or were you more disappointment to leave the Rangers?

Tom Laidlaw: That's a great question. When I first heard I was traded, I was devastated. I had been assistant captain or captain for the Rangers and had won The Players' Player award twice so I felt like I was a big part of the team. At the time of the trade the Rangers were the only team I had played for. Once I got to Los Angeles I



realized how good of a team the Kings really were. We have young players like Luc Robitaille and **Jimmy Carson** and older guys like **Dave Taylor** and Bob Bourne. It didn't take me too long to really enjoy playing for the Kings and living in Southern California.

MW: The Kings trading Marcel Dionne was the end of an era, so to speak, in Los Angeles. Being traded the other way with Bobby Carpenter, did you feel any added pressure to perform knowing that the Kings' biggest star for years was suddenly gone?

TL: I don't think I felt any extra pressure because I was a defense-first player. There was probably more pressure on Bobby because he could put points on the board.

MW: Throughout your playing career, you were known as a reliable stay-at-home defenseman who helped complement an offensive resurgence, especially when Wayne Gretzky joined the club in 1988. Former Kings defenseman Dale DeGray, for instance had told me that he thought of you as a mentor. How do you feel you helped the Kings while you were there, especially the defensive corps which included, along with the aforementioned DeGray, Steve Duchesne and Tim Watters?

TL: It's great to hear those names again. They were great teammates. I hope what I passed along to them was that they just needed to do their jobs. When you were playing on a team with Wayne it is easy sometimes to get caught up in trying to be a star. Wayne was a great teammate and totally understood and supported the players who just did their job.

MW: New York and Los Angeles are two of the biggest cities in North America, much less the United States. Yet, in many respects, it's impossible to compare the two. From hockey popularity to lifestyle, what were the biggest similarities and differences between the two cities?

TL: I think the biggest similarity is that there is so much else going on in both cities that you can hide a little bit and really enjoy the cities almost anonymously. Both cities were very much the same and that there was an attraction to the star athletes. I saw the difference in Los Angeles in the pre-Wayne days and the days after Wayne arrived. After Wayne arrived there were more movie stars at the forum then there were at the Oscars.

MW: Following your player career, you became a player agent, first for IMG and then for your own firm, Laidlaw Sports Management. What inspired you to follow that path and what kind of advice can you give to someone who is looking to become an agent themselves?

TL: I actually started my own business first and then went to IMG. I was with IMG for about five years and then went back on my own again. I got started when another agent approached me about being a recruiter for him. Being my typical stubborn self, I thought I should do it on my own instead of working for someone else. It

worked out well for me mainly because I had just left the game and knew so many people that were working in the game. It is a tougher business to get into now because there are so many more agents. I think there are really two paths to get into the business. You can go work for a bigger agency or start your own business. Obviously based on my past, I prefer to run my own business.

Tom Laidlaw - Practical Joker 90-91



Tom Laidlaw would **go on to play** 195 games over four seasons for the Los Angeles Kings, during which time he would score five goals and add 40 assists to go in hand with a plus-38 rating. Laidlaw's toughness remained but amassed far fewer penalty minutes once he reached the west coast, averaging just over 39 minutes per season — a significant drop from his season average of 80 with the Rangers. He was also known to keep the locker room loose as a practical joker (as seen in the clip above).

Just 18 months after Laidlaw joined the Kings, the club would acquire Wayne Gretzky in arguably the biggest acquisition in hockey history. Laidlaw would then help the Kings oust the defending Stanley Cup champion — Gretzky's former team — the **Edmonton Oilers** in the 1989 playoffs. Laidlaw would then retire early in the 1990-91 after just four games with the **IHL's Phoenix Roadrunners**.



Fortunately, Laidlaw was able to find success following his playing career with his aforementioned career as a player agent — an **NHLPA** Certified Agent — for his own firm, **Laidlaw Sports Management**, which has been operating since 1991. He is also the owner of **Post Game Strategies** — which he founded in 2007 — which matches businesses with potential investors by working with athletes, both active and retired. Both firms are based in Rye Brook, New York.

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A veteran of 10 NHL seasons, Tom Laidlaw was one of the toughest defenseman of the 1980's. In 705 career games, the now-58-year-old would score 25 goals and register 164 points while amassing a grand total of 717 penalty minutes. Aside from his toughness, though, Laidlaw was a leader, serving as alternate captain for the Rangers in addition to wearing the C for a time.

Laidlaw, in fact, was so respected as a member of the New York Rangers that in the 2009 book, '*100 Ranger Greats: Superstars, Unsung Heroes and Colorful Characters*' by **Russ Cohen, John Halligan** and **Adam Raider**, he **was ranked** No. 87 among all players in the franchise's long, deep-rooted history.

He was with the Kings at a crucial time in the club's history and with his defense-first style mixed in with his grit and leadership, Tom Laidlaw has gone down as one of the more underrated players in the silver-and-black's history.

For more information on Tom Laidlaw and his current ventures, be sure to visit **Laidlaw Sports Management** and **www.postgamestrategies.com** today.

Tom Laidlaw, here's to you.