

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM TERRY RUSKOWSKI

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 December 22, 2016



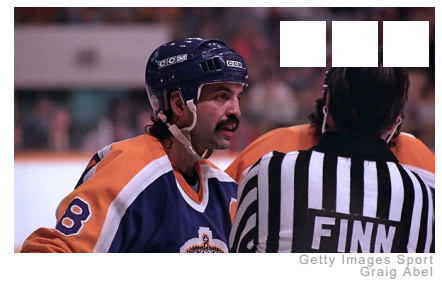
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Following their shocking playoff upset of the juggernaut **Edmonton Oilers**, the **Los Angeles Kings** had entered the 1982-83 season with high hopes as they were looking to make some more noise in their return to the playoffs. Unfortunately, despite improving by three wins and three points from the previous season, the Kings missed the playoffs in 1983. Yet, in spite of their aforementioned upset of the Oilers, the Kings were still a very young team and while **Dave Lewis** remained the captain the following season, the forum-blue-and-gold had acquired former captain **Terry Ruskowski** early that season. Ruskowski, after just one season with the Kings, would be awarded the club's captaincy in time for the 1983-84 campaign — a position he held until his departure in 1985.

Born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, on December 31, 1954, Terry Ruskowski

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had began his professional not in the **NHL** but in the rival **World Hockey Association**. Drafted by both the **Chicago Blackhawks** and the WHA's **Houston Aeros** in 1974, Ruskowski chose the latter club where he was teammates with **Mr. Hockey** himself, the late, great **Gordie Howe**. But, when the WHA officially closed its doors in 1979, Ruskowski joined the



Blackhawks where he was named the team's captain, taking over from the late **Keith Magnuson**, who retired after just three games into the 1979-80 season. Ruskowski would remain the Chicago captain until October 23, 1982 when he was traded to the Kings [for **Larry Goodenough** and a draft pick] just five games into the season. So, while the Blackhawks awarded their vacant captaincy to future Kings head coach **Darryl Sutter**, Ruskowski was bound for Los Angeles to join his new club. Yet, while he was able to rack up a few points along the way, Ruskowski was most known for sticking up for his teammates, which meant dropping the gloves with

many opponents. Despite his undersized 5-foot-9, 170-pound frame, Ruskowski not only went the distance with his opponents but won against many of them as well, including then-rookie [and future Kings enforcer] **Marty McSorley**.

In this week's edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Terry Ruskowski, who shares his feelings on being traded to Los Angeles, his overall experience with the Kings and even his career overall, which included playing alongside a young **Mario Lemieux** in **Pittsburgh** — where Ruskowski was also a captain. Ladies and gentlemen, this is Terry Ruskowski.

Hockeyfighters.cz Marty McSorley vs Terry Ruskowski.wmv



Make Way for the Kings: You had spent the first three years of your NHL career with the Chicago Blackhawks before being traded to the Los Angeles Kings in 1982. Describe how you felt about being traded and how did you feel about joining the Kings?

Terry Ruskowski: Well, training camp didn't start off very well. The year before, I had knee surgery in Chicago and my numbers were down. So, the next year, the new coach came in, **Orval Tessier**, to coach Chicago and I was the captain of the team and things just weren't working out really well in training camp. You kind of got the



sense that [Tessier] didn't like you too much, so I guess he didn't like me a whole lot. I know that I didn't start the season off playing, so I knew I was in a situation where something was happening, or could happen. So, I talked to **Bob Pulford**, who was the general manager at the time, and he played in Los Angeles. So, he said it's a new coach and new philosophy, so just come to practice early and work hard, be the last one [off the ice] and show that you want to stay here. So, I said okay and I did everything else and joined the other guys to start competing to prove that I wanted to stay [in Chicago]. Well, it didn't help a whole lot and, all of a sudden, we went to St. Louis and I played a lot there — I had a goal and an assist if I'm not mistaken. Then after the game, I saw someone from Los Angeles there and the next day, I went from St. Louis back to Chicago when Bob Pulford pulled me aside and said, "There was a trade last night and you go to Los Angeles."

Of course, the first thing in your mind is, "Geez, I can't believe this. I just bought a house, my family's here, I got to uproot, I'm going to go to a place where I don't know anybody," so I said, "When do I have to leave," and he said, "Well, they're playing tonight, so they want you to play tonight," and I go, "You got to be kidding me!" So, I went home, packed some stuff, went back to the airport with my hockey bag, some personal belongings, flew to L.A. Unfortunately, my van couldn't make it there in time, so I couldn't make the warm-ups but I played the game, I started the game, I was in the lineup and I was on the ice. And of course, obviously playing all day and flying all afternoon, my legs weren't there and I wasn't in the best shape to begin with because I didn't get any playing time during the game or a lot of ice time during practice. So, I flew out of shape but I got [to Los Angeles] and I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was the first time — I didn't have much to do with it — but it was the first time that [the Kings] had beaten **Boston** in L.A., so everyone there's pretty happy but I was totally exhausted. I stayed at the hotel right across the street from the **Fabulous Forum** and I was sitting back there, just taking it all in when **Jerry Buss**, the owner of the team at the time, walks in and he had two or three movie stars with him a couple big-name athletes with him and I thought, "Wow, this is incredible," and [then-Kings forward] **Charlie Simmer** goes, "Yeah, this happens sometimes," and I go, "Are you kidding me? I'm loving this big-time! This is great!" So, after that, I got into better shape and I started playing a little bit that year. The next year, I started playing with **Bernie Nicholls** and **Jimmy Fox** and we really blended really well together as all three of us had pretty good seasons, so I was pretty happy about that. But I absolutely loved L.A.! Absolutely loved L.A.! It was just the climate, the living— it was perfect — the weather. I got to know the players and I really liked the players a whole lot. I got along with every one of them and had a blast. I still think about those days and meeting all the movie stars was unbelievable and then I find out later that all the movie stars want to be athletes and all the athletes want to be movie stars. So, it was incredible and I got to meet a lot of cool people there. I got really close to **Greg Sierra**, a movie star. He was in numerous shows on TV and in movies and he was a huge hockey fan. Actually, **Miami Vice**, he was in the first three episodes as the Chief of Police

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[Lou Rodriguez]. We got along really, really well. All I can say is that I had a great time in L.A. I enjoyed every minute of it and I'm certainly blessed to have gone there. The only thing that happened is that it was so expensive there to live and I wasn't making a whole lot of money, so I couldn't afford to live there. So, at free agency, [the Kings] wanted to sign me to a one-year extension but I was talking to Pittsburgh and [the **Penguins**] were offering me two years and an option, so because I was getting up there in age and I wanted more security for my family and myself, I signed with Pittsburgh and ended up playing with Mario Lemieux.

MW: After your first season with the Kings, you were named the new captain after Dave Lewis had been traded. How were you approached with the news and what do you feel you brought to the table as the club's captain?

TR: I didn't know that I was going to be captain of the Kings. I had my game that I played. I didn't have a whole lot of talent, I wasn't a natural goal-scorer; I was a good passer and I worked hard all the time. In practices and in games, it was always the hardest I could go and I guess [the Kings] saw that and they saw that I could stick up for teammates. I said things in the dressing room that got [my teammates] motivated sometimes — I was hoping anyways. I wasn't a big partier, so that was another key factor living in L.A. But I just wanted to win and I think the people there knew I wanted to win and I worked hard, did the best I could to the best of my ability, and I think they recognized that, so they made me the captain. I was very honoured to be the captain [in Los Angeles]. It's an honour to be a captain anywhere to be honest, and I was very fortunate to be captain of a couple of other teams, but again, I enjoyed it [in Los Angeles]. I loved it. Being a captain was just such a honour with the Los Angeles Kings. I got my jersey on the wall, framed in my man cave: Los Angeles Kings with a 'C' on it, so it brings back some fond memories.

MW: After finishing last in the Smythe Division in your first two seasons, the Kings got into the playoffs in your third. What positives can you take away from that season?

TR: We didn't make the playoffs one year but then made the playoffs the next year. We had a pretty good hockey team. We scared some people, there's no question about that, the way we played. I think the problem we had was the travel. The travel schedule was real bad, especially from L.A. [The NHL] didn't have the teams they have now in California. I think what took the wear-and-tear out of a lot of the people — the players — was when we went on road trips, we would go on two-, three-week road trips and when we were home, we were home for two or three weeks. So, in the playoffs, I thought we did well but I think we could have done better. I think nowadays, they have charter planes. You get on a plane and travel there, two or three hours, you're home and whatever. But, I think the travel, the wear-and-tear of the travel really took a toll on the players, especially at the end of the season when you're coming into the playoffs. Overall, though, I thought we had a pretty good team. We had **[Charlie] Simmer**, we had **[Marcel] Dionne**, **[Dave] Taylor**, our line — Fox, Nicholls

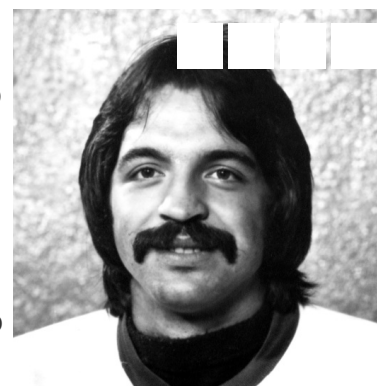
and myself — I thought we had a good team. We had some hard hitters — J.P. **[John Paul Kelly]** was a hard-hitting guy and I thought our defense was good. I thought we had a good hockey team, but when you're playing in a division against Edmonton, you know it's just going to be a battle against them but I know that a couple years before was **'The Miracle on Manchester'** and that was incredible, just unbelievable. They would keep on showing you over and over in the dressing room and in the game what happened, and I'm sure it was pretty exciting to happen. It was a good feeling to make the playoffs.

MW: Describe some of your favourite moments both with the Kings and of your overall playing career.

TR: One of the things I remember in hockey, not the professional ranks but in the junior ranks [with the **WCHL's Swift Current Broncos**], we actually weren't supposed to do very well. We won the first series [in the 1975 playoffs] against the **Flin Flon Bombers** in seven games and then we actually took the team who had won the **Memorial Cup**, the **Regina Pats**, to seven games. In professional, playing with Gordie Howe [for the WHA's Houston Aeros], playing with Mario Lemieux who, at that time, was going down as one of the best hockey players ever, but playing with Howe who had such a legendary career, was a great thrill for me.

I had just bought a house in Houston and I was out with one of my friends and she was helping me get furniture for my new place and I didn't have a pre-game meal — I think I had a sandwich and a Coca-Cola for lunch. I got dressed, went to the game, we won the game and I scored four goals. The next day, [the media] said, "Ruskowski scores the Texas hat-trick," *laughs* because everything's big in Texas. The other thing is [the 1982 playoffs] in Chicago, we went to the semi-finals. We won our first two rounds and we were playing against **Vancouver** [who had eliminated the 'Miracle' Kings the previous round] to play against the **Islanders**. So, going out for warmups that one day, that one game, was so

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unbelievable. For warmups in the NHL, you usually have 5- or 6,000 fans coming in at that time. Well, we had at least 12,000 at **Chicago Stadium** and all they did was cheer the whole time to do warmups. It was absolutely— I had never felt that before. I was so pumped up and did whatever I had to do. I just told Bob Pulford, our coach, to start me and never take me out *laughs*. I was just so jacked up, I just wanted to play. I wanted to just do well. It was an unbelievable feeling and that was a high moment in my life. Then, having my kids was a high moment, too, outside of hockey. Those kinds of memories— you know, I loved every win and I hated every loss. I'm the same way as a coach now: I love to win; I hate to lose. I even tell [my players], "Just to prepare you, I'm a horrible loser but I'm a great friggin' winner." *laughs* But those are some of my highlights in hockey, plus playing with some great players like the Dionnes, the Taylors, the Simmers and the Foxes. Those types of players— a lot of the kids today don't remember them because, obviously, times have changed. I

keep on telling [my players] who I played with and they go, “Who? Who?” *laughs* and I say to just look at the Hall of Fame.

Coach/GM Terry Ruskowski on shaping the 2013-14 Mallards



Terry Ruskowski retired three games into the 1988-89 season as a member of the **Minnesota North Stars**. The diminutive tough guy finished his professional career having played 999 games — 630 in the NHL; 369 in the WHA. In the NHL, Ruskowski finished with 113 goals and 426 points while amassing a grand total of 1,354 penalty minutes. But, the bulk of Ruskowski’s playing career came with the Kings where, in 226 games, **he notched** 125 points and 360 penalty minutes. Over the course of his career, Ruskowski fought with many players much bigger than him, reminding this writer of a scrappy former Bruin, **Stan Jonathan** who, like the former Kings captain, was smaller in stature but tough as nails. In addition to the aforementioned Marty McSorley, Ruskowski has dropped the gloves with big guys **Jim Peplinski** and **Garth Butcher** and, while as a member of the Blackhawks, future TV analyst, the always-entertaining **Mike Milbury** and Darryl Sutter’s oldest brother, **Brian**, who **leads all** Sutter brothers with 1,786 career penalty minutes.

Along with **Wayne Gretzky** and **Mark Messier**, Terry Ruskowski holds the unique distinction of captaining three different teams, and for good reason.

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While he may not have been a natural goal-scorer, Ruskowski proved early on that he was a natural leader, even if that meant getting into a few tussles with the opposition. In fact, his leadership skills have transferred smoothly behind the bench. Shortly after his retirement, Ruskowski returned to his native Saskatchewan where he coached the **WHL's Saskatoon Blades** for two seasons. From there, Ruskowski moved onto the **ECHL** with stops in the **International Hockey League**, **United Hockey League** and **Central Hockey League**. In fact, it was in the latter league where Ruskowski enjoyed championship success, leading the **Laredo Bucks** to the **Ray Miron President's Cup** title in 2004 and again in 2006. During his coaching career, Ruskowski has accomplished quite a lot, including winning Coach of the Year honours in both the UHL and CHL, becoming the first bench boss to coach four different expansion teams and winning over 600 career games. These days, Ruskowski's business address is in Moline, Illinois where, since 2012, he has been the head coach and GM of the ECHL's **Quad City Mallards**, an affiliate of the NHL's **Minnesota Wild**. As of Wednesday morning, the 2016-17 Mallards are off to an impressive 15-8-2 start to the season. While many Kings captains were known to drop the gloves from time to time, no one was more famous for it than Terry Ruskowski who, despite his knack for fighting, was never known as a dirty player, or a goon. He was much too talented and much too respected for that. In fact, Ruskowski's fearlessness wasn't duplicated by a Kings captain until **Dustin Brown** during his run, and that speaks volumes. They may not have had much on-ice success during his tenure but Terry Ruskowski will be — and has been — nonetheless remembered as one of the most respected captains in Los Angeles Kings history, and that is an honour that has been well-earned by one of the franchise's hardest workers.