

# ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM SEAN O'DONNELL

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 March 17, 2017



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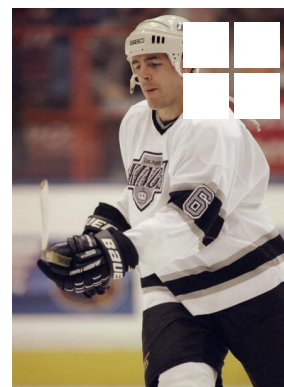
As great a teacher as she was, Mrs. M. was also a huge hockey fan. In fact, during the 1993 playoffs, it was entertaining watching her make sentences that resembled the players from her beloved **Toronto Maple Leafs** — i.e. “Andrew chucked” (**Dave Andreychuk**); “When Del...” (**Wendel Clark**); or “Gill more!” (okay, that one’s self-explanatory). Later that spring, however, she realized that she wasn’t too fond of the team that ultimately eliminated her Leafs: the **Los Angeles Kings**. Just over a year later, though, that changed.

I was fortunate enough to have Mrs. M again as my teacher and while her love for the Leafs was still strong, she now had a new-found infatuation with the Kings who, just a couple of months earlier, had traded for her nephew: one **Sean O'Donnell**.

Unfortunately for both Mrs. M and I, each of our teams would soon be on the decline despite both being on the precipice of the **Stanley Cup Final** just over a year earlier. The Kings had just missed the playoffs in 1994 and while they made the **Conference Final** again, the Leafs wouldn’t make it back to the **NHL’s** final four for another five years. For the Kings, though, despite where they were heading, they nonetheless had a pretty promising youth movement, which included O'Donnell, who had been traded to the Kings that June by the **Buffalo Sabres**, who had drafted him in the 6th round in 1991.

O'Donnell would play for the Kings for a combined eight seasons, spanning two separate, not to mention contrasting, tenures. He would even return to the Kings following his playing career as an in-game analyst and as part of the club’s Player Development program.

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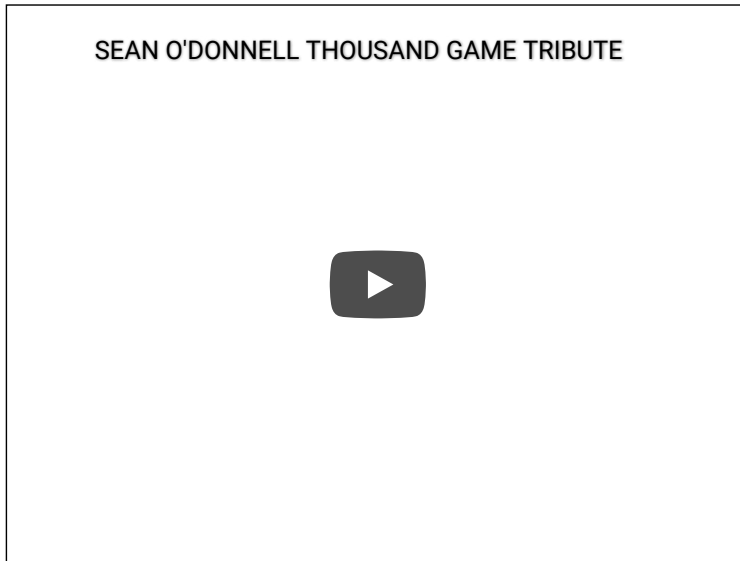


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In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Sean O'Donnell who tells us about his experiences with the Kings, especially his latter tenure, which included playing alongside a young up-and-coming defenseman named **Drew Doughty**.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is Sean O'Donnell.



**Make Way for the Kings:** You began your Kings career in 1994 when the Buffalo Sabres traded you to Los Angeles. Being that you hadn't played for the Sabres, were you determined at all to prove the Sabres wrong for trading you or were you more focused on creating success for yourself with a new team?

**Sean O'Donnell:** At the time, you're more interested in just getting to get to the NHL, but yes, you do use that as motivation. The thought that anyone gave up on you is certainly motivation.

**MW:** After a five-year absence, the Kings returned to the playoffs in 1998. How did Larry Robinson's coaching style push the team in the right direction?

**SO:** Larry is one of the great hockey minds. He was able to take a decent team and get us into the playoffs. We didn't have the success we would've liked, but just getting in was impressive.

**MW:** In both of your tenures with the Kings, the team had gone through a couple of rebuilding phases. From your vantage point, what were some of the big differences between the Kings' rebuilding phase of the mid- to late-90's in comparison to the Dean Lombardi era?

**SO:** I came to the team much further along in the rebuild the second time. My first tenure with the team, we rebuilt from scratch in my second or third year, so it was a much longer and more painful process to go through.

**MW:** Speaking of your second tenure, you re-joined the Kings at a very important point. In addition to Terry Murray having been hired as the new coach and the Kings having just drafted, among others, a talented young defenseman by the name of Drew Doughty. As a veteran defenseman at that point, what role did you play in helping Doughty adapt to the NHL?

**SO:** You could tell Drew had a quality about him right off the bat that the sky was the limit. To go along with his obvious talent, he picks things up quickly, and once he gets it, he gets it. I'd like to think I had a small, small part in helping his development, but he was destined for greatness no matter what.

**MW:** While the Kings struggled early on upon your return in 2008, there was a palpable feeling among fans that this team was going to be contending for a Stanley Cup in the very near future. What was the collective attitude like both in the locker room and on the ice between 2008 and 2010?

**SO:** You knew things were moving in right direction. There was [Anze Kopitar] and [Dustin] Brown already there, then trades for [Matt] Greene, [Jarret] Stoll and [Justin] Williams and the growth of Doughty, [Wayne] Simmonds, [Jonathan] Quick. You just knew good things were happening and it was fun to be a part of for two years.

**MW:** In addition to being an analyst on FS West, you work for the Kings in their Player Development department. Tell us about that.

**SO:** I help out with some of the young D-men throughout the organization. It's fun help out and teach things you've learned over your career.

Sean O'Donnell vs Dion Phaneuf Nov 25, 2008



When I first heard his name, I loved Sean O'Donnell. Granted, that was more of a result of having a bias towards Mrs. M. than anything else. Nonetheless, O'Donnell grew on me, in addition to so many Kings fans, over the years — and for good reason.

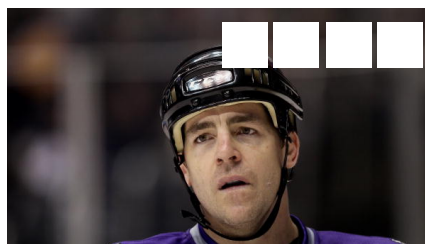
At 6-foot-2, 230-plus pounds, Sean O'Donnell was a rugged defenseman whose physical style was integral in helping the rebuilding Kings return to the playoffs in 1998 and while they were swept in the opening round that spring, the native of Ottawa, Ontario, nonetheless made a significant impact in helping the Kings become relevant again. O'Donnell was also, above all else, reliable as he played in 80 games each season from 1997 to 2000 before moving his career north where he joined the expansion **Minnesota Wild**, ultimately **becoming** the club's captain.

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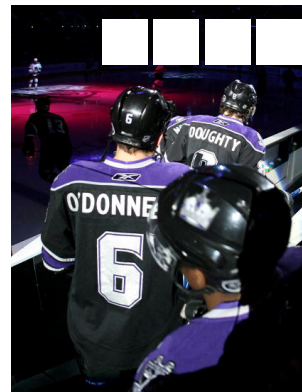
After stops in **Boston** and **Phoenix**, O'Donnell would return to southern California in 2006, joining the **Mighty Ducks of Anaheim**, helping them win, to the chagrin of Kings fans, the **Stanley Cup** the following year. That season, O'Donnell would appear in every regular-season and playoff game for the Ducks as they defeated the big man's hometown team, the **Ottawa Senators**, in five games.

When he re-joined the Kings in 2008, though, Sean O'Donnell was the veteran leader, joining a club which had a palpable, and even unprecedented, level of excitement. After all, while they weren't a playoff team just yet, the direction of the Kings, led by GM **Dean Lombardi**, had shown fans that this club was serious about winning a Stanley Cup. From Kopitar and Doughty to Brown and Quick, the Los Angeles Kings were on the verge of garnering critical league-wide attention, and Sean O'Donnell's contributions were key.

Overall, O'Donnell **would play** 541 games for the Kings, scoring 15 goals and 83 assists while showing off his tough, physical side by racking up 940 penalty minutes. During his latter tenure, O'Donnell dished out 164 hits and 183 blocked shots, showing off his defensive prowess as well.

Overall, O'Donnell played in 1,224 games in the NHL, scoring 31 goals and 198 assists to go along with 1,809 penalty minutes. He would retire in 2012 after stops in **Philadelphia** and **Chicago** but would be back with the Kings as an analyst and as a member of the club's all-important Player Development department — both capacities he continues to work in to this day.

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From the time a proud Mrs. M first told her students about her nephew to watching him today analyzing games between periods, Sean O'Donnell has been a solid fixture for the Los Angeles Kings, contributing so much on the ice but just as much off the ice as well as fans speak glowingly of their former defenseman, and understandably so.

As we look back on 50 years of the Los Angeles Kings, we simply cannot do so without recognizing one of the club's biggest influences in multiple capacities.

Thank you, Sean O'Donnell.