

# ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM DAVE LEWIS

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 October 11, 2016



*Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo credit: LA Kings*

Wearing the 'C' for any team is, without a doubt, a prestigious honour, but one that comes with a plethora of responsibility.

The early 80's were a pivotal time for the **Los Angeles Kings**. While they had established veterans like **Marcel Dionne** and **Mike Murphy**, the Kings were loaded with youth. Talented, yes, but not as seasoned as the veteran corps. From **Jay Wells** and **Larry Murphy** to **Steve Bozek** and **Doug Smith**, the Kings looked to be a team on the rise. However, like any successful club, they needed a captain to lead the way.

Just prior to the 1980 playoffs, the Kings made a major trade when they sent star forward **Butch Goring** to the **New York Islanders**. In exchange, the Kings received **Billy Harris** and a reliable stay-at-home defenseman in **Dave Lewis**.

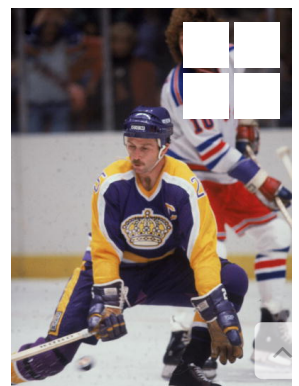
Yet, while Goring would go on to share dynastic success with the Islanders, those pieces that went to Los Angeles could not go unnoticed, especially Lewis.

Lewis's contributions in Los Angeles were so appreciated, in fact, that following the 1980-81 season, he was named the team's new captain, succeeding the aforementioned Mike Murphy, who had worn the 'C' for the previous six seasons.

In his two seasons as captain, Lewis's role was a critical one.

In addition to the aforementioned youngsters, the Kings had some balance with the scoring prowess of **Charlie Simmer** and **Dave Taylor**, who were on the famed 'Triple

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**Crown Line**’ with the aforementioned Dionne. By 1981-82, though, the Kings were, for lack of a better term, green. On paper, they had the talent but they didn’t quite have the experience. That all changed in the spring of 1982 when Lewis and the Kings opened the playoffs against the powerful **Edmonton Oilers** – a series that is celebrated to this day.

In a continuation of **Make Way for the Kings**’s exclusive **’Royal Reflections’** series, we speak with former Kings captain Dave Lewis, who discusses coming to Los Angeles, which meant leaving an Islanders team on the precipice of their famed dynasty, taking over the captaincy from the popular Mike Murphy and, of course, **’The Miracle on Manchester’**.

This is Dave Lewis.

Barry Beck vs Dave Lewis Oct 17, 1982



**Make Way for the Kings:** After spending six-plus seasons with the New York Islanders, you and Billy Harris were traded to the Kings in early 1980. How did you feel about joining the Kings and better yet, how did you feel leaving the Islanders who you had seen first-hand be built from a proverbial basement-dweller into a championship team?

Dave Lewis: At that time, all of the Islander players had heard rumors about a big trade coming. It was a sad day for me to leave the [Islanders] team. We had gone through so much together and it was my first trade. It is always the most difficult to accept.

I recall sitting in the window seat on my flight to L.A. I was thinking to myself I will never be back to dress for the team that drafted me! The trade hit me hard.

Besides me getting traded that day, my wife was pregnant with our second child and I had to leave all the moving details for her.

**MW: In the Kings, you were joining a team with plenty of upside. In addition to one of the best lines in league in Dionne-Taylor-Simmer, the Kings had some promising youngsters in goaltender Mario Lessard and defenseman Mark Hardy. How confident were you that the Kings could contend, especially in later years when Bernie Nicholls and Steve Bozek joined the team?**

DL: When I got to the Kings, you could see that the team was in a transition mode. They were releasing older players to make room for a group of younger players, Jim Fox, Jay Wells, Mark Hardy, Larry Murphy, et cetera. There was a lot of excitement and hope looking forward.

**MW: You were named the Kings' new captain before the 1981-82 season, succeeding Mike Murphy who had worn the 'C' for the previous six seasons. How was it decided that you would be the new captain and how did you feel?**

DL: Mike was a very good captain and accepted me as the one to follow him. He and his wife Yvonne had made my wife, Brenda, feel very comfortable joining the team. We spent time at their house picking their brains on where to live in LA. Our son, Ryan, played with their sons, Sean and Ryan. Our daughters were born two weeks apart.

I am not sure how it was decided to name me as the Captain, but it was a real honor to accept the title.

**MW: How would you describe yourself as a captain? When you were a coach in Detroit years later, you were known by many as a player's coach — someone the players would feel comfortable around. Was that the case in Los Angeles? How did you communicate in the locker room and on the ice? Did you learn many leadership tactics with Islanders from, for instance, Al Arbour or Denis Potvin?**

DL: To me, a Captain just leads by example on and off the ice. It had to be done my way and the way I felt it had to be done. I was around one of the greatest coaches in hockey for almost seven years. I learned a lot about what was right and what was wrong when it came to playing a team game.



The way I communicated on the ice and in the locker room were pretty much the same. Just being positive and focused on the task at hand. Never really getting too high or too low. Making sure that all the players were good team-wise.

**MW: The Miracle on Manchester is one arguably one of the greatest comebacks in hockey — much less Kings — history. You played a pivotal role not only in that series but in that game as, among other things, you were the recipient of a Garry Unger high-stick, which led to a critical — and tone-setting — major power play. Could you take us through what that series was like and how you liked your chances, especially given how many rookies the Kings had?**

**DL:** I have nothing but “great” memories of the Miracle on Manchester. I remember looking at the Oilers bench at the start of the 3rd period. Players and coaches were just laughing at us! The game was over in their mind, BUT not in ours. I really can’t explain what happened that night, but things really started to go our way in the 3rd period. I do remember getting high-sticked by Gary Unger behind our net and blood running down my face. I was really pissed off!! I don’t recall leaving the ice to go and get stitches. What I remember is when we scored the tying goal the doctor was putting a stitch in over my eye, he jumped up and so did my eyelid! Funny for sure!

**MW: Overall, how would you describe your tenure with the Kings?**

**DL:** Our time in LA was great! I was named Captain, our team had some good success for being so young. Our daughter was born our first year in LA and we made some very, very good friends who we are still in touch with today. A lot of very special memories!

Kings high-stick Gretzky - Line Brawl - 1982 Playoffs

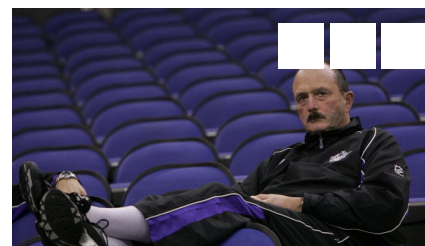


For three-plus seasons, Dave Lewis left his mark on the Los Angeles Kings, even if you didn't find him on many highlight reels.

While his defensive prowess helped them on the ice, Dave Lewis's leadership skills helped a young Kings team off the ice, becoming an instrumental part in his team's accomplishments, notably their next-to-impossible upset of the juggernaut Edmonton Oilers in 1982.

Lewis **would go on to play** 221 games for the Kings, scoring five goals and adding 36 assists all the while displaying his exceptional defensive game. But Lewis's time as the Kings captain was especially beneficial as immediately after finishing his playing with the Detroit Red Wings, he would step behind the club's bench as an assistant coach — a position he held for 13 seasons — helping them win three Stanley Cups.

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Dave Lewis came to Los Angeles to help a young, inexperienced team reach their potential, and that is just what he did. It may have been somewhat brief, but Dave Lewis's tenure with the Los Angeles Kings is no less memorable, no less celebratory, and for his contributions, we thank him.

*\*Special thanks to Alex DiFilippo and the Detroit Red Wings Alumni Association for making this interview possible.*