

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM MATHIEU GARON

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 March 20, 2017



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Despite the looming lockout in 2004, **NHL** teams were not deterred from making moves. Regardless, if said lockout were to last a day, a month or a year, until the **Collective Bargaining Agreement** officially expired, teams went about their business as usual. The Los Angeles Kings were no exception to this as they traded for goaltender **Mathieu Garon**.

As we know, the lockout would sadly cancel the entire 2004-05 season, so Garon's debut with his new team would be put on hold. Until then, the native of Chandler, Quebec, went to the **AHL** where he kept busy by playing for the **Manchester Monarchs**. When the lockout did end, though, it was time to prepare for a new NHL season and the Kings, despite their struggles before the work stoppage, were rearing to get back into the swing of things. The same could be said for Mathieu Garon whose solid play behind **Jose Theodore** in **Montreal** earned him a shot at being a starter. This was his chance.

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When the 2005-06 was set to begin, Mathieu Garon was ready to go but would enter the season battling for the number-one spot with newly-signed **Jason LaBarbera**. Yet, despite the excitement of the return of hockey, it would be a tough couple of years for the Kings and Garon, too, who, in spite of winning 31 games in his first season, would be plagued by injuries in his second campaign, leading to the netminder moving on.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with former Kings goaltender Mathieu Garon, who discusses his career with the club, which includes his stint in Manchester during the lockout and what the



Kings expected of him upon being acquired from the **Canadiens**. Garon also tells us about winning the Stanley Cup in 2009 with the **Pittsburgh Penguins** and even what he's up to today, which includes coaching.

This is Mathieu Garon.

Goaltender Mathieu Garon - LA Kings 2013 Training Ca...



Make Way for the Kings: After establishing yourself as a solid netminder behind Jose Theodore in Montreal, you were traded to the Los Angeles Kings in June 2004. How were you treated upon your arrival to Los Angeles and what were the team's plans for you?

Mathieu Garon: I think when I got traded to L.A., [then-Kings GM] **Dave Taylor** had big plans for me. It just happened to be the lockout year, so they sent me to Manchester [to join the AHL's Monarchs] for the whole season to make sure I was playing a lot; the previous in Montreal, I had only played 20 games. So, [the Kings] wanted me to become the number-one goalie and I got to play a lot in Manchester, but I think it threw me down a little bit. I was coming off a really good year in Montreal and I was ready for the next step to play in the NHL and I think the lockout slowed me down a bit but I got to play a lot of games.

MW: When the lockout did end, you would play 63 games for the Kings in 2005-06, posting a record of 31-26-3 while sharing the goaltending duties with Jason Labarbera. How did you find your first season in Los Angeles and what was your relationship with Labarbera like?

MG: I got really lucky to play a lot of games, you're right, and I think I had a pretty good relationship with Jason Labarbera — we were both in the AHL

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the previous year. So, it started really well for me. I think it was December when I won 'Player of the Month' — my first time in the NHL — and after Christmas, I felt like I didn't play so good. I got a few injuries after that. But, I think we had a really young goalie tandem in Jason and I and I think at one point, we could've used a bit more experience as we may have been a little too young, the two of us together. When the season started, [Jason] only had 12 NHL games and I only had 45 NHL games total. We were pretty young two goalies but I think it was good for me that I got to play that many games.



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MW: In 2006-07, you were limited to just 32 games as the Kings used four other goalies that season, including off-season acquisition Dan Cloutier. What was your mindset not only when Cloutier came in but for that season overall?

MG: I think— well, when we got **Marc Crawford** as a coach that summer and they signed Dan Cloutier, I knew I wasn't really going to be in the plans anymore. I knew I was still going to play but I knew Dan was Marc's guy [dating back to their days together in Vancouver], so it was a little hard for me but at the same time, I think I had a good season. I didn't get to play as many games, but if you look at the stats comparing him to me, I think at the end of the year, I got a chance to play good games, played good, but I broke a finger that year and tore a groin, so again, injuries didn't help and I remember at some point that all our goalies were injured and we had a lot of goalies that got to play that year. It was tough because we didn't win and we didn't make the playoffs. It was hard even 20 games after we knew we were going to be out, so it was tough that way.

MW: One of the Kings' five goalies that season was Sean Burke. As a seasoned veteran, how important was his presence on the team that season?

MG: It was great to have him around. I grew up watching him. He was a really great goalie before and I had the chance to get to know him and have him on the team really helped me a lot. It's sort of a— I feel like if I had him the year before when I needed a little bit more experience behind me, I think it would've been a little bit different. He was great. He tried to help me and it was really good to have him around. I'm still very, very happy I got the chance to play with Sean Burke at some point in my career.

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MW: You left the Kings in 2007 for Edmonton, but in 2009, you would win a Stanley Cup in your next stop, Pittsburgh. While this certainly seems like a redundant question, how did you feel when you won the Stanley Cup, especially after such a hard-fought series against Detroit?

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MG: Oh, it felt great. In Edmonton, I got to play a lot and had a really, really good season and again, I got hurt. The next season [the Oilers] had three goalies, so the first couple of months were really hard. I felt like I didn't get all the work I needed in practice, we had a young goalie they didn't want to put on waivers, so [the situation] played a lot in my mind and, at some point, I wasn't playing great anymore. Then, I got traded to Pittsburgh. I was a little surprised but at the same time, I knew something was going to happen. Then I got to Pittsburgh and we were 10th in the league, not even in the playoffs, and then [the Penguins] started playing awesome and got a chance to make it to the playoffs, make it to the Finals and Game 7 — won that game. It was great to be a part of a bunch of— a great group of players but I still had a chance a month ago to get a bit of a reunion there. Just to be around these guys again was great, so great memories for me.



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MW: These days, you have quite a few things on the go. You are a coach with both the Tampa Bay Lightning and for Garon Goaltending as well as working with the Lightning High School Hockey League. Tell us about that.

MG: When I retired— I played a little bit in Russia when I retired. I started working a little bit with young goalies in the Tampa Bay area. Then, the Lightning offered me to do a few things around there. [Former Lightning GM] Jay Feaster has a program there to go to a game for community hockey in Tampa, so I've been working with them, going into schools and trying to teach them about street hockey, to try to get them to start to skate. I'm also doing the 'Learn to Play' program, that's the program from the NHL and the NHLPA, trying to get new kids on the ice; we get kids for eight weeks, we work on them and try to get them to start playing hockey with USA Hockey. So, the things I'm doing, I'm doing private lessons with goalies and sometimes— the last two summers, the Lightning, they were kind of enough to invite me to their rookie camp in the summer, their development camp and I've been working with them trying to learn new things, so they've been great with me.

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He was traded to the Kings for netminder **Cristobal Huet** and while the latter found some success in La Belle Province, Garon also had his share of success in a Kings uniform, helping a struggling squad finish 42-35-5 in his first season. Unfortunately, with said injuries coupled with the signing of Dan Cloutier, Garon's days in Los Angeles appeared to be numbered the following year. Fortunately for Garon, as mentioned, Sean Burke was one of the Kings' five netminders in 2006-07 as the veteran netminder helped the younger netminder with his game but with his confidence as well. This may not have helped him in Los Angeles but Burke's guidance did benefit Garon for the remainder of his playing career.

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In his second and final season in Los Angeles, Garon was limited to just 32 games (32-10-6 with a 2.66 GAA) as the Kings **finished** 27-41-14 — 21 points worse than the previous season and 28 points out of a playoff spot. The Kings **had finished just** six out of a playoff spot the previous year.

In total, Mathieu Garon **played** 95 games for the Kings, amassing a record of 44-36-9 with a 3.03 goals-against average. Following his time with the Kings, Garon made stops in Edmonton, Pittsburgh, **Columbus** and **Tampa Bay** before briefly returning to the Kings in training camp 2013 and ultimately retiring after a season in Russia.

His Kings career may have been brief but Mathieu Garon's time in Los Angeles is nonetheless worth reflecting on as he helped make a positive impact on a team that struggled to find their way in the mid-2000's. These days, though, Mathieu Garon is taking his experiences by helping to mold the next generation of goaltenders, to instill confidence in them while helping them harness their craft to the best of their abilities.

As we look back on 50 years of the Los Angeles Kings, we reflect on Mathieu Garon's time with the franchise and we tip our caps to the former netminder.

