

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM DARREN ELIOT

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 April 3, 2017

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In 1980, the **Los Angeles Kings** drafted him 115th overall, but he would elect to play three more seasons of college hockey before representing his country at the Olympics. By the time he made his Kings debut in 1984, goaltender **Darren Eliot** would bring with him a plethora of wisdom and experience most rookies could only dream of.

A native of Milton, Ont., Darren Eliot would play his collegiate hockey at prestigious **Cornell University** where **Ken Dryden** began to turn his heads before embarking on his Hall-of-Fame career. While at Cornell, Eliot had **established himself** as a solid netminder, earning himself two **All-Ivy** selections and **All-American** honours in 1983. He even formed a long-term friendship with a man he shared his goaltending duties with a player who not only moved on to the NHL, as well, but is also an analyst, working for the Kings' cross-town rivals.

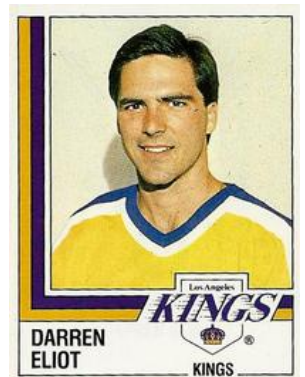


Photo courtesy: Panini Stickers (1987-88)

Following his collegiate career, Eliot would then have the honour of representing Canada at the **1984 Winter Olympics** in Sarajevo before joining the Kings later that year. But, it was with the Canadian team where Eliot learned from revered national coaches **Dave King** and **George Kingston** the details of training both mentally and physically as well as a better general understanding on the game.

His NHL career would last five seasons but his career in hockey would last much longer as today, Darren Eliot **works with** a younger generation of hockey players as the Director of Minor Hockey Operations for **Little Caesars Amateur Hockey**.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with former Kings netminder Darren Eliot who speaks with us about how his careers at Cornell and with the Canadian National team helped him prepare for the National Hockey League and, of course, his career with the Kings.

This is Darren Eliot.

Darren Eliot talks about USA Hockey's new goaltending initiative



Make Way for the Kings: You were drafted 115th overall by the Kings in 1980 but spent the next three seasons at Cornell before joining the Canadian National team. How did your time at Cornell and with the National team help you prepare for the NHL?

Darren Eliot: Well, the best part of playing at Cornell was the college experience and how it's quite separate from the pro game. But, I shared the net for three seasons with **Brian Hayward** and became very good friends. I think we pushed each other to be better goaltenders by training and competing with and against one another.

The national program had to do with learning the game. Coach Dave King, George Kingston and **Jean Perron**, but the first two men in particular, really opened my eyes to the details of training, both mentally and physically, and preparing, studying and understanding the game. Then, when I got to Los Angeles, I had the benefit of playing for coach **Pat Quinn**, one of the best player coaches of all time.

So, it was certainly a progression. Each stage seemed to prepare me for the next.

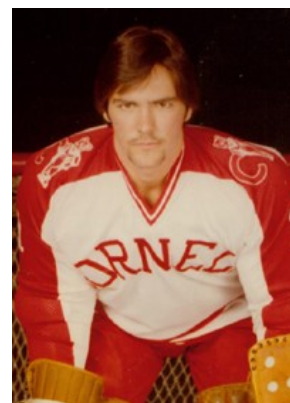


Photo courtesy:
www.CornellBigRed.com

MW: One of your teammates with Canada was future Kings teammate Craig Redmond. What was your relationship with Craig like and how did his presence help you when you joined the Kings?

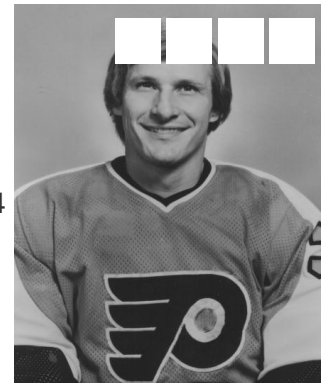
DE: Well, Craig was– it’s funny how time passes — he was going into his draft year when we were on the Canadian Olympic team together, so he was a young guy; I was an old guy *laughs* having graduated from college already, so there was a gap that way. But, the familiarity and knowing Craig, it was more of getting to share those experiences with a guy you already had a relationship with as a teammate. It was exciting to move from the national program to the pros together but at the time, we didn’t know that was going to be the case. I knew I was going to aspire to be on the Kings roster. He had to be drafted but it just so happened that he was drafted by the Kings and I was elated that he was a teammate of mine before the draft. But, the other part of it was– that was an exciting year because we had six rookies start that year with the Kings, so it wasn’t just Craig and me joining the Kings. It was a group of rookies and we were two of those six.

MW: During part of your time with the Kings, one of the club’s assistant was Phil Myre. Being a former goaltender himself, how much of an influence did Myre have on your game?

DE: Well, Phil Myre, longtime [NHL] goalie, he and Pat Quinn were friends and had been teammates with the **Atlanta Flames**. Phil had just been recently retired, so the relationship I had with Phil was contentious at best. He was the first goaltending coach I ever had and he had never been a goaltending coach as he had just retired from being a player. So, he was trying to develop a role that was relatively new in 1984 and I really didn’t know how to respond to some of the stuff that he was presenting.

I’m still friends with him all these years later and he was a goalie coach for a lot of years after that with several NHL organizations. But, to say at first that I wasn’t buying what he was selling, I was open-minded to some of the stuff, but I thought that some of it didn’t help me really; it was just a clutter. But, he probably got better and hopefully I got more mature *laughs*.

Embed from Getty Images



Bruce Bennett
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MW: Who were some of your biggest influences while with the Kings and how did they help you moving forward?

DE: That’s interesting in terms of influence. Pat Quinn certainly had an influence on me. **Mike Murphy** was the assistant coach, a longtime Kings player. He moved into the coaching ranks and actually took over for Pat in my fourth year out [in Los Angeles]. Those two men certainly.

Players, I got to know some tremendous veteran players. **Marcel Dionne**. He had an influence on me from the standpoint that I saw how hard he worked at making hockey relevant in Los Angeles, pre-Gretzky. He had been



there forever and I had always admired him before that. So, the importance of trying to make it work and the team might not be that good all the time or that consistent in a market that was lukewarm at the time.

So, those two coaches and that veteran, Marcel Dionne– but there were lots of characters that came through there. **Bob Bourne**, what a nice man, seeing him come over from a winning culture with the **New York Islanders**, seeing him and his family deal with his son who has spina bifida and just the love, the caring and the passion that he displayed and still could produce on the ice. So many– **Jimmy Fox**, **Phil Sykes**, they were friends of mine at the time.

So, there were– it's funny how people influence you. It's something that stays in the moment and some that you carry on much further on and I had both of those kinds of influences during my time in L.A.

MW: Today, you work as an in-game analyst for Fox Sports Detroit covering the Red Wings and also as Director of Minor Hockey Operations for Little Caesars Amateur Hockey. Could you tell us about both of those roles and how are enjoying them?

DE: I've enjoyed broadcasting, being part of youth hockey organizations but I've kind of married the two for over 20 years and I enjoy them both for different reasons. I love staying in the game at the highest level, having access to the best hockey and the best hockey minds in the NHL and seeing what's going on all the way down to the **Learn to Play** programs, the **Little Wings** programs, being part of Little Caesars Amateur Hockey and heading up their hockey club. It's a great honour being that it's one of the most prestigious youth organizations in all of sports — notable across the world and certainly across North America. The challenge is bringing the two brands — the iconic brand of the **Detroit Red Wings** and Little Caesars together — a great challenge but also a great opportunity with **Little Caesars Arena** opening up which will be our home base, which is fantastic.

*Photo courtesy:
www.goaliesarchive.com*

On the broadcasting side, again, like I said, it keeps me looking at the game fresh, current, see how the game is evolving and kind of understand it through the eyes of today's player and today's coaches. So, like I always say, if I'm in the rink, I'm happy and both jobs, both opportunities keep me at the rink as much as possible and I wouldn't have it any other way.

MAHA Goaltending Workshop - Stance and Positioning

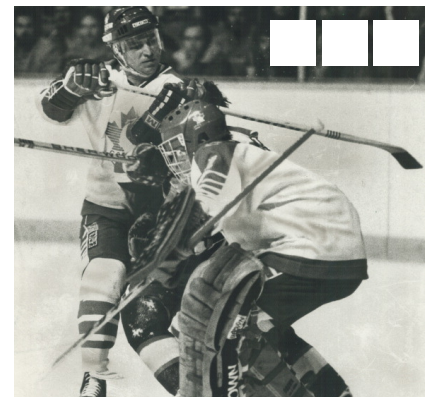




From representing his country on the world's biggest stage to playing in the National Hockey League, Darren Eliot has had a great playing career between the pipes. In fact, in 1996, his alma mater gave him the highest honour, **inducting him** into the **Cornell Athletic Hall of Fame** joining the aforementioned **Hockey Hall-of-Famer** Ken Dryden and friend and former teammate Brian Hayward. In later years, the school's Hall of Fame would also induct, among others, Hockey Hall-of-Famer **Joe Nieuwendyk** and former King **Matt Moulson**.

Also during his time at Cornell, Eliot earned membership into the school's **Red Key Athlete Honor Society** for students exemplifying excellence in academics and athletics. Eliot graduated from Cornell with a degree in agricultural economics.

For fans of the Los Angeles Kings, many remember Darren Eliot fondly. While the Kings had their share of struggles during this time, Eliot nonetheless kept his team competitive while battling division rivals such as the juggernaut **Edmonton Oilers** and the up-and-coming **Calgary Flames**.



Since his playing career in the NHL, which also included stops in Detroit and **Buffalo**, Darren Eliot has played a major factor in helping to strengthen minor hockey in the Metro Detroit area.

Prior to joining Little Caesars Amateur Hockey, Eliot served as the Director of Programming and Communications for the Detroit-based **Suburban Hockey Group**. The organization houses more than 400 youth players at the travel and house level in nearby Farmington Hills, Mich.

Darren Eliot has plenty to look back on when it comes to his career in hockey at any capacity. Most particularly, though, we look back on the former netminder's career with the Los Angeles Kings and underline his importance to the club.



As we reflect on 50 years of the Los Angeles Kings, we recognize, and celebrate, the contributions made by Darren Eliot.