

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS LEGEND LARRY MURPHY

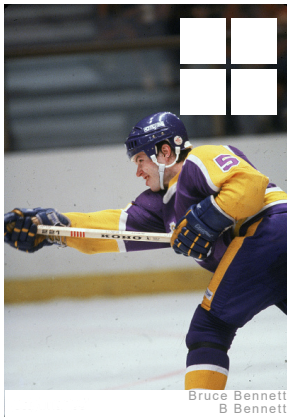
👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 February 7, 2017



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No matter how talented a player is, for some who are drafted in the first round — much less the Top 5 — the pressure of performing at the highest level may prove to be too great. This is especially the case for those who jump right into the NHL upon being drafted. This, however, was not the case for **Larry Murphy**, who the **Los Angeles Kings** drafted fourth overall in 1980.

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While he would help bring the Kings success in the three-plus seasons he suited up for them, Larry Murphy was poised for bigger things.

Born in Scarborough, Ontario, on March 8, 1961, Murphy would go on to establish himself as a quiet but effective defenseman who displayed perseverance and longevity, playing in 1,615 career games, amassing 1,216 points along the way (third and fifth respectively all-time among **NHL** blueliners). But it all started in Los Angeles where, in 252 games for the Kings, Murphy would collect 207 points (52 goals, 155 assists) while



helping solidify a defensive corps that included, among others, **Dave Lewis** and **Mark Hardy**. Murphy would also play a pivotal role in helping the Kings achieve, at the time, their great playoff triumph with '**The Miracle on Manchester**'.

Unfortunately, a conflict with the cantankerous, not to mention unpopular, Kings GM **George Maguire** led to the blueliner's exit from Los Angeles. But three decades later, Larry Murphy is still celebrated as one of the best players in Kings history. Additionally, Murphy even admitted that he felt that he was, in a small way, a part of the success that brought the Kings to their first **Stanley Cup** victory in 2012.

This is Kings legend Larry Murphy.

Legends Night - Larry Murphy (07.12.13)



Make Way for the Kings: After just two seasons with the OHL's Peterborough Petes, you were taken fourth-overall by the Los Angeles Kings in 1980 and started your career with them that fall. As a 19-year-old, you joined a veteran club that included the Triple Crown Line of Marcel Dionne, Dave Taylor and Charlie Simmer in addition to the likes of Mike Murphy and Dave Lewis. But you weren't the only youngster on the team as Jim Fox (20) and Jay Wells (21) were also with the Kings that season. Describe how you felt when you first entered training camp and even the regular season? How did your high draft status affect joining your new team? Did it give you more confidence?

Larry Murphy: Well, it was a situation with L.A., being the fourth-overall pick and heading into camp that year, [the Kings coaching staff] made it quite clear that I was going to be with the team that season. So, that gave me a bit of an advantage. I knew I had to play well enough to get a spot in the lineup but I knew I was going to

start with the team. But, my goal was that I wanted to play every game. I didn't want to get there and to be in a situation where I was watching [as a healthy scratch] for quite a while.

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Bruce Bennett | B Bennett

I had the good fortune— I had a couple of other young guys in the situation that, I think, helped. **Jimmy Fox** and **Greg Terrion** and there were guys – **Jay Wells**, Mark Hardy, **Dean Hopkins**, **J.P. Kelly** – those were guys that were in their second year, so there was a young core, a young group of guys to go along with the veterans that you mentioned.

Fortunately for me, I had Dave Lewis as my first defense partner — it was quite clear early on in camp that that's who I was going to be playing with – a real strong, stay-at-home defenseman who taught me quite a bit. So, all the pieces were in place to succeed. **Bob Berry** gave me a good share of ice time, I had gotten into the flow of things and the season really went as well as I had hoped and the number of elements which I mentioned were a big part of it.

MW: Your rookie year was a successful one. Appearing in all 80 games, you registered 76 points, trailing only the members of the aforementioned Triple Crown Line for the team lead. Your contributions helped the Kings finish second in the Norris Division for the second-straight year. How comfortable did you feel in the lineup as the season went along not only on the ice but in the locker room as well?

LM: We had an excellent season, no doubt. We had some big impact guys on the team with, of course, the 'Triple Crown Line', but I thought we had a real good, strong, consistent season and it was really tough during that time because travel was a killer for the team and it was impressive, I thought, what were able to accomplish. The closest team [geographically from Los Angeles] was Colorado [home of the since-relocated **Rockies**] and even Vancouver was tough to get to crossing the border into Canada and it was a balanced schedule and we were flying east consistently.

I thought our team was really well-rounded. We did have the guys that we accounted for but for myself, I tried to approach the season where I would try to improve every game and, I touched on it before, but I played with Dave Lewis throughout the season and that was a real steady factor for me. I had never played a season that long coming out of junior hockey. I wanted the advantage of playing junior hockey over college hockey

because the junior hockey schedule is much longer and not nearly as long as the NHL, and that was one thing I had to get used to: the grind. It seems like you're playing every other night and with the horrible travel, we were flying commercial at that time getting on planes, and that was something we had to try and overcome. I thought getting into the playoffs was— we definitely started to feel [the momentum] coming back to us.

MW: Your coach in your rookie year was Bob Berry. Describe his coaching style and how you benefited from it?

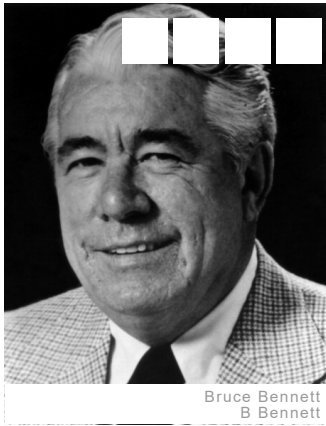
LM: I thought Bob Berry was an excellent coach and really got the most out of the team. It was unfortunate that we had the early exit but that can happen to anybody. Looking back on that season, I thought it was a real positive and something the franchise could really build around and Bob Berry spearheaded that.

When Berry held practices, he did an excellent job managing the bench and I thought he did a good job of managing practices and travel. We practiced hard when the scheduled allowed and he was smart in terms of preparing the team and getting in the best position in order to do well in games. He wasn't the most boisterous guy but extremely effective when he talked. He had everybody's ear and everyone had confidence in him and I hope I'm not stepping on questions down the road but a huge mistake by the franchise to let him go.

MW: Just six games into the 1983-84 season, you were traded to the Washington Capitals. While it must have disappointing to leave the Kings, you were joining a team who, the previous spring, made the playoffs for the first time. You were also becoming teammates with, among others, a sophomore defenseman – and future Hall-of-Famer – in Scott Stevens. Describe the overall feeling of being traded for the first time in your career.

LM: It was disappointing. I enjoyed playing in Los Angeles and it was a great city to play for. Unfortunately, we weren't first page of the sports section but we had a hardcore following of fans and it was– you know, I enjoyed my time there. Very disappointed it was based over a contract dispute. I went to arbitration after my third season and, at that time when they solved arbitration, it was still new and to say that it was heavily weighed towards the team would be an understatement.

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What happened was that I went in with a number, George Maguire, our GM, went in with a number, and we both provided our case as best as we could, and the arbitrator decided on a number less than either side agreed on. So, I went to George and said that I can't play under this and he even believed I was worth more, but George, in his position, said, "You have to play it," and I said, unless we redo the deal, to trade me because it wasn't going to be a good situation for the whole year. He said fine and a couple days later, he traded me to Washington.

So, it wasn't a total surprise but it was a disappointment. I wish it didn't work out that way. I wish I would have stayed in Los Angeles but when I think of the circumstances, I was just so upset. I could have lived with George Maguire's number, and he gave a reason why he felt that was the case, but for less, I just felt I was basically cheated by the system and unfortunately, it wasn't meant to be. But going to Washington, it was a place where I got to play with **Rod Langway**. He won the **Norris Trophy** for a couple years that I played with him when I was his partner — and I learned a lot. So, for my career, it turned out to be a positive but definitely it's a hit to get— you have your heart and soul in a team and then you're leaving it, it was pretty upsetting. But with time, you go to a new team and the players do the best they can to welcome you.

MW: You were an integral part in turning a once-hapless Capitals franchise into a bona fide contender, but you were perhaps more instrumental in Pittsburgh with the Penguins who, despite having Mario Lemieux, never had much NHL success before the 1990's. In the 1991 playoffs, though, you notched 23 points in 23 games to help the Penguins win their first Stanley Cup, which was also your first. Describe your experiences that postseason and the thrill of winning your first Cup. Was there any added excitement knowing that you won against your old team, the Minnesota North Stars, in their building?

LM: Pittsburgh was— of course winning the Cup is what every player dreams of. Pittsburgh was a great opportunity and when I got there, it was a real deep team. This was pre-salary cap days and Pittsburgh had really made a push in terms of trying to win the Cup. We had "**Badger**" **Bob [Johnson]** who was an

outstanding coach, an outstanding person and just a tremendous amount of respect from the players trying to mold this group, and I stepped in and he gave me opportunities — I played on the power play, played on the penalty kill. You learned quite a bit and it was an exciting opportunity because it meant playing on a team with a tremendous amount of depth. We had guys like **Bryan Trottier** who was playing a third-line center. I mean, this was someone who, early in his career, was one of the best players in the league. He won four Stanley Cups [with the **New York Islanders**] and comes to Pittsburgh as a support guy but still, just shows what it takes to be a champion. So, I go to Pittsburgh and my dream as a kid finally comes true playing as a boy in my backyard. The dream was to hoist that Stanley Cup and getting to Pittsburgh, walking up and down that line was— to say I was excited for the opportunity is somewhat of an understatement. I was ecstatic.

MW: After winning two Cups in Pittsburgh, you would win two more, helping the hard-luck Detroit Red Wings end their 42-year championship drought in 1997. The Maple Leafs had just traded you that March. Along with Brendan Shanahan, you were a key piece added that season to help the Red Wings get over that hump and win the Stanley Cup. How did you feel about your contribution to the Red Wings that spring and how do you compare it to your first Cup in Pittsburgh?

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LM: Kind of a back story where winning with Detroit was, I actually had a no-trade clause with the **Maple Leafs** and I had met with general manager **Cliff Fletcher** a couple weeks before and talking about [the Leafs] and what they're going to do at the deadline, told me that they weren't looking to trade me, and I believed that. Fortunately for me, the deadline was at 3 o'clock and I got the call at 2:45 pm and fortunately, I was by a phone. I could have been doing a lot of things at the time when you don't have access to your phone. It's like everyday life — your phone's not necessarily glued to you. Anyways, I get a call at quarter-to not even thinking it'd be Cliff Fletcher on the other end and he said, "You know, I wasn't going to trade you but this opportunity just came up which I know would interest you," and he told me it was with the **Detroit Red Wings**, a great franchise and a strong chance to win the Cup, and I'd have **Scotty Bowman** coaching me who had me during my second year, my second Cup in Pittsburgh, so I knew him very well. So, it was an easy decision to say yes, ^

but I think back that if I hadn't been by that phone, that opportunity never would have come. So anyways, I decided there, it took me two seconds to say, "Yes, waive my no-trade clause for Detroit," and I get to Detroit and a very similar situation, Detroit comparable to where I was in Pittsburgh: a team with a lot of talent on it — this is, of course, still pre-salary cap days — a lot of depth, I stepped into a situation where I really think we had a great chance to win. The team really took off as the season went along. We improved, we had a big game against the **[Colorado] Avalanche** — at home, an overtime win — and the team took off. But, same situation than with Pittsburgh: I got a lot of ice time and they were a great group of guys that really made me feel welcome and a team that was tremendous to play with, getting production from all four lines. We could just go in there and overpower the opposition and have the puck for the majority of the game.

MW: In 2004, your first year of eligibility, you were inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. Where were you when you first got the call and could you describe your feelings not only when you first received the news but when you were officially inducted that November?

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LM: I was actually at home and I had known that it was that time of year when the selections were announced and I didn't know what day or time, but I was at home when I got the call. It hit me a lot harder than I thought. I knew it would be special to get into the Hockey Hall of Fame and I knew I'd cherish it, but it hit me harder than I thought because I— **Jim Gregory**, at that time, was chairman of the **Hockey Hall of Fame** and he gave me a call to congratulate me. Then, it seemed like, at that moment that all of a sudden, I thought about all the other players that had already been in the Hall of Fame and to become company with peers of that group was pretty overwhelming. It hit me a lot harder than I thought and, to this day, I still get a lot of pride in the fact. I look at it as an affirmation, a stamp on a successful hockey career and It's something that gets mention all the time. You know, any time you hear, "Larry Murphy inducted into the Hall of Fame '04," every time I hear that, I feel very proud. It's something that I cherish and, as I say, it's an affirmation and it comes with a tremendous amount of pride.

But, talking about Los Angeles and how I started there and what it meant to play in Los Angeles and talking about hitting me more than I thought. You talk about the Kings winning the Stanley Cup and even though I hadn't played there in many years, I felt pride. I felt like I was a small part of that. The fact that I played for that

franchise, I was very proud of the Kings and very excited because that was my first team, that's what got me going in the National Hockey League and it really- when they won the Cup, I felt like, hey, I may a tiny part of that building towards the Cup but still, I feel like I was a part of it.

Larry Murphy beats Chico Resch 10/15/81



In this writer's mind, the trading of Larry Murphy was arguably one of the biggest mistakes the Los Angeles Kings ever made. The aforementioned George Maguire shipped his star defenseman to the **Washington Capitals** in exchange for **Ken Houston** and **Brian Engblom**. While the latter pair would combine for just 93 points over the remainder of their respective careers, Murphy was only scratching the surface with his Hall-of-Fame career.

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Belonging to a defensive corps that included future Hall-of-Famers Rod Langway and **Scott Stevens**, Murphy would help establish the Capitals, once notorious for their futility, as a consistent force which includes a memorable playoff series win against the **Philadelphia Flyers** in 1988, which saw them fight back from a 3-0 deficit in Game 7 to win in overtime — on a **Dale Hunter** breakaway goal set up by Murphy himself. It wouldn't be until a few years later, though, when Murphy would win hockey's greatest prize.

In a decade where parity became the norm in the National Hockey League, the 1990's saw Larry Murphy win four Stanley Cups while becoming just the fourth player in NHL history to celebrate consecutive Cup victories with two different teams. In addition, Murphy became just the second player to accomplish the feat in the post-expansion era (Bryan Trottier) and the second to accomplish said feat in the same decade (**Dick Duff**).

He has gone down as one of the greatest defensemen to ever play the game. While his stops in Washington, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Toronto and Detroit have all been noteworthy — and rightfully so — we would be remiss without calling attention to the first stop of Larry Murphy's legendary career. In fact, the Kings organization was so grateful for Murphy's services that on December 7, 2013, **they honoured** the Hall-of-Fame defenseman as part of their exclusive **Legends Night** series.

The Los Angeles Kings had high hopes when they drafted him in 1980 and those hopes were delivered as Larry Murphy, despite being just 19 years old, wasted precious little time in making opponents, critics and fans across the league take notice of one of the game's next big names on the blueline. We remember Larry Murphy and, three-plus decades after his departure, we celebrate what he brought to the Kings and how he made them not only relevant but formidable.

As we look back on 50 years of the Los Angeles Kings, let us tip our caps to one of the greatest defenseman in hockey history, and a true Kings legend, Larry Murphy.

