

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM SCOTT BARNEY

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 March 27, 2017



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When the **Los Angeles Kings** drafted him 29th overall in 1997, **Scott Barney** was on his way to great things. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case — at least not right away.

Following his junior career with the **OHL's Peterborough Petes**, Barney moved onto the **AHL's Springfield Falcons**. However, since his junior days, the 6-foot-4 right winger had suffered from a back injury, which only got worse as time went on. Finally, after just six games with Springfield, Barney's back injury became so severe that he would be out of hockey for the next three years.

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Fortunately for Barney, despite his sabbatical, the Kings held onto their prospect and, between 2002 and 2004, the Oshawa, Ont., native would be back in hockey splitting his time between Los Angeles and the **AHL's Manchester Monarchs** in what is an inspiring story of resilience and perseverance.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Scott Barney who shares with us his experiences with the Kings, from being drafted by them to ultimately playing for them after a difficult road to recovery. The former King also discusses the back injury and said road to recovery that kept him out of action indefinitely. Barney even discusses his career since leaving the **NHL**, which, today, includes playing for the **China Dragons** of the **Asia Hockey League**.

This is Scott Barney.

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Make Way for the Kings: You were drafted 29th overall by the Los Angeles Kings in 1997 and the following season, you scored 44 goals and 76 points in 62 games for the OHL's Peterborough Petes and nearly a goal a game the following year. However, after a brief stint in the AHL with Springfield, you had suffered what was thought to be a career-ending back injury. How did the injury happen and when did you first notice that something was wrong?

Scott Barney: Well, I think the injury just got– it was one of those things that got worse and worse every day where I couldn't really bend over and touch my knees anymore. It just came to a point where I was signed by L.A. and I went and saw their doctors and basically had some disc injuries, but then I went and saw a bunch of specialists. [The Kings] were great to me. They treated me first-class. Saw a bunch of doctors all over the place and eventually, two-and-a-half years later, I saw an osteopath in Montreal, which started to help the process get better and from there, it's been great ever since.

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MW: As a result of your injury, you were out of hockey for three years. Was there ever a time you felt like hanging up the skates or were you determined to remain in hockey?

SB: Yeah, definitely. That's a great question and people always ask me that one. It's definitely something that came to the back of my mind and was something more of, "Will I be able to play again," or, you know, you miss that being in the dressing room with the guys and that feeling that you have. But, my determination was the



biggest thing to get back and it proved people wrong that I could still play again and, you know what, still playing now at- [I'm 38 now] and I still really enjoy playing the game.

MW: Following your three-year absence, you returned to the game in 2002-03, splitting your time between the Kings and their then-AHL affiliate, the Manchester Monarchs. To be able to return to the highest level after such a long layoff speaks wonders not only about the rehabilitation process but about the individual. Could you describe both your rehab process and your overall attitude upon your return?

SB: I went onto the training camp there in L.A. on a tryout basis, this after my three-year contract had expired. I went down to Manchester and **Bruce Boudreau** was coaching there and he was probably one of the best coaches I ever had and it obviously shows as he's been very successful in the NHL. I went down [to Manchester] and learned a lot from him and then I got the call-up and obviously it was a dream come true and it kind of just put all of those three years kind of behind me and the hard work to maybe get back and put all the naysayers' thoughts away.



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MW: How excited were you when the Kings called you up during that first season back?

SB: Yeah, obviously I was very excited and like I said, a dream come true and, you know, a lot of people thought after a year or so off, there's no chance I'll ever even play hockey again let alone in the AHL or the NHL. So, it was very rewarding.

MW: Describe your mindset in returning to training camp in 2002. How receptive were your teammates upon your return? How supportive was the organization during this time and did it differ much from when you were first drafted?

SB: You know what, the L.A. Kings were always very supportive of me and that's one thing you always hear: horror stories about organizations. But, [the Kings] were first-class in everything they did. **Dave Taylor** was the GM at the time and the support he gave me and **Andy Murray** coaching there and it was just- you know, from the time I was even drafted to the time I got injured to the time I was back playing, [the Kings] were always there, 100% supporting me. I always knew it would be a difficult process after being three years off and they were surprised at how well I did do, and that first year, I was a bit tired after missing all that time and getting your legs back and, you know, get the rhythm back going. My teammates were always very supportive. I remember **Ian**

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Laperriere was always great to me and **Dan Bylsma** in my first training camp. You remember those guys that were there always supporting you — guys that made everyone feel welcome.

MW: While your NHL career finished in 2005, you continued to play overseas in countries such as Germany, Finland and Italy. This season, you joined the China Dragons. In your short time in China, could you describe how you enjoy playing hockey in that part of the world? From your vantage point, how popular is hockey in China?

SB: It's been a great experience. I played in nine different countries now in Europe, including two in Asia. Here in China, the hockey culture's not so big but obviously, they're trying to make it big with the— they're hosting the **[Winter] Olympics** in Beijing after they're in Korea next year, so [China] will be hosting in 2022. So, I think there's a big push to get hockey bigger. The city where I'm playing is called **Qiqihar**. We're 1,400 kilometres north of Beijing. We get about 2- to 3,000 fans a game, which is big for [Asia League Ice Hockey] but, for example, we play some home games based out of **Shanghai** because they're trying to make the game popular and we'd be at a 20,000-seat arena with 20 people sitting there. So, I think the more north you are, the hockey's popular like Beijing, Qiqihar and there's also actually **Harbin**, but they're trying to grow the game. But, yeah, we'll see what happens but I've enjoyed it so far over here and it's been definitely an eye-opener.

MW: Overall, where was your favourite place to play and why?

SB: That's a great question. Many great places. I'd say in North America, a great spot was playing in Hershey, Pennsylvania. The fans were always supportive as far as the AHL. Then in Europe, I'd have to say— where in Europe? Everywhere's been great *laughs*. Germany was great, Finland was great. Favourite place, hmm, that's a tough question *laughs*. I've never really had any bad experiences. Everywhere I go, I've tried to embrace the culture. I think it was just important for guys to go to Europe as it's definitely a culture shock. I would say— Finland was great. It gets dark in the winter but the people were so— they open up their arms to you and make you really feel like you're at home, so— and for my family, it was great, too. Really enjoyed Finland.

Scott Barney



Had this been 18 years ago, many would have felt sorry for Scott Barney, having an injury that would force him to walk away from the game he loved playing since he was a young boy. But there's no reason to feel sorry for Scott Barney. Never has he wanted pity because, simply put, he was always too good for that, too strong for that.

Being human, Scott Barney went through a myriad of emotions during his time away from the game between 1999 and 2002. Yet, through the bad times, there was always something inside the former King that made him keep going and even to exude patience and perseverance in reaching his goal. To say that Scott Barney never gave up on himself goes without saying but just as importantly, the team that drafted him five years earlier never gave up on him either.

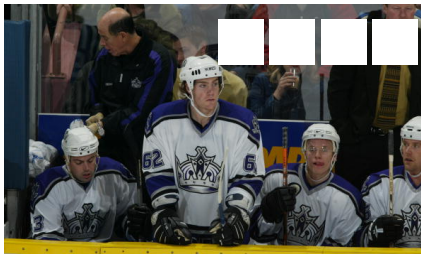
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Despite playing just 24 games for the Kings over the course of two seasons, Scott Barney was nonetheless thankful for his second chance — a chance that has allowed the former King to play the game he loves all across the globe. Unfortunately, since playing in China requires road trips to last as long as two weeks, **this has been** the first time where Barney's family has not been with him.

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Barney, however, uses his off time to return to his home in Ennismore, Ont., as much as he can but remains in regular contact via **Facetime** with his wife, Tara, and their children, daughter Charlie and son Jack. In fact, Barney was able to witness the birth of his son, Jack, via Facetime, who was born just a few months ago on Dec. 17.

A back injury may have put his career on hold but it didn't end it. Instead, Scott Barney returned to hockey with a vengeance before traveling the world and forming a plethora of lifelong friendships along the way.

Scott Barney's story is one that should make anyone and everyone believe, "If he can do it, why can't I?"

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If more of us had the resilience, the perseverance and even the sheer will that Scott Barney possesses, it is amazing just to think of what can be collectively accomplished. After all, Barney, who celebrates his 38th birthday today, can look back on his career and be confident knowing that he wouldn't change a thing. Skeptics would have suggested that his back injury closed a door; and while that may be true to a degree, the fact is is that the injury actually opened many more doors in the process.

He was a Los Angeles King for just a brief period but Scott Barney nonetheless left his mark on the team that drafted him, leaving the Kings and their fans in awe of how he fought his way back to professional hockey. It is something that makes any fan or member of the Los Angeles Kings proud knowing that Scott Barney was once — and, in many ways, still is — one of their own.

Scott Barney, we salute you.

