

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM BOB BOURNE

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 March 8, 2017



Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo credit: Peter Read Miller

Since their inception in 1967, the **Los Angeles Kings** have always had some sort of championship lineage in their locker room. Whether it was **Red Kelly** and **Bob Pulford** from their **Toronto** days or **Terry Harper** and **Steve Shutt** from their **Montreal** days, the Kings, while they may not have always been championship contenders, nonetheless had players or coaches who joined their club as proud owners of Stanley Cup rings. The same can be said for **Bob Bourne**, who was integral in helping the **New York Islanders** win four-straight **Stanley Cups** in the early 80's.

Drafted by the **Kansas City Scouts** in 1974, Bob Bourne would never play for the club. Instead, the Scouts traded him that summer to the Islanders where he played for the next 12 seasons. But, as the 1985-86 came to a close, the Islanders, who were just three years removed from their last Stanley Cup victory and two from their last Finals appearance, were beginning to rebuild.

With **John Tonelli** having been traded earlier in the season to **Calgary** (who made their first Finals appearance that spring) to **Bob Nystrom** retiring to the legendary **Al Arbour** (temporarily) stepping down as coach, the New York Islanders were moving past their championship years. Bob Bourne was also included in the exodus, if you will, as on October 6, 1986, the native of Netherhill, Sask., was claimed off waivers by the Los Angeles Kings.



Photo credit: HHOF.com

Yet, despite the championship pedigree he brought with him to southern California, Bob Bourne did not bring the Kings the same success he helped bring to Long Island — something the 14-year NHL veteran admits that ^

he was embarrassed about. Still, there were some positives from Bourne's two-year tenure with the Kings, including forming some great friendships off the ice.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Kings alum Bob Bourne who shares with us his experiences in Los Angeles but also what he learned from playing with dynastic Islanders, including the influences the aforementioned Al Arbour and some of his teammates had on him.

This is Bob Bourne.

Game 5 1983 Patrick Division Final NYR @ NYI Bob Bourne Undresses The Coliseum



Make Way for the Kings: You spent the final two seasons of your professional career with the Los Angeles Kings scoring 20 goals and 40 points in 150 games. What were some of your highlights with the team and how do you feel looking back on your career in Los Angeles?

Bob Bourne: Well, I'm going to be totally honest here, and I'm very embarrassed about it, but I went out [to Los Angeles] not knowing what to think and I had played in an organization [the New York Islanders] that every day, the only thing you did was win; that was the only option. I got to L.A. and it was a little bit different, but I made some really good friendships there; I really did. I really loved **Rogie Vachon**, and he was my GM, and I

really loved **Bernie Nicholls** and **Larry Playfair** and just met some really good people. **Tommy Laidlaw** I became good friends with, **Dave Taylor**. But you know what, it was just different. It was so different when I got out there because I'm coming from New York where all- what we do is win, and you go out [to Los Angeles] and it was just a different atmosphere. But, I'm not saying a thing about anyone else. All I know is that I- my mind wasn't into it for the two years I was there and I feel so bad about that because I could've made a difference. Then, the next year, **[Wayne] Gretzky** came in and **Larry Robinson** and **Kelly Hrudefy**, and that would've been great. I retired that year. I could've went back since I still had a year left in my contract. I could've gone back and I wish I had now.

But anyway, long story short, I'm embarrassed about the way I played there, I wasn't as intense as I should have been and I kind of- I've always wanted to apologize to the L.A. Kings for that *laughs*. But, great bunch of people and I will never forget them.

MW: Prior to joining the Kings, you spent 12 seasons with the New York Islanders who you helped win four-straight Stanley Cups in the early 1980's. During that time, you played for Hall-of-Fame coach, the late, great Al Arbour. How influential was Mr. Arbour in your career on Long Island?

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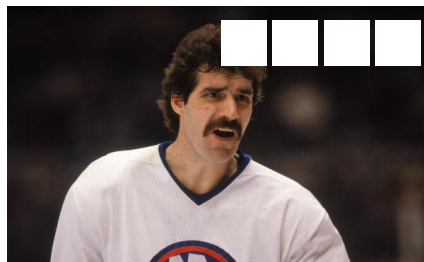
BB: Yeah, Ryan, [Al] was like a father figure to me. You know, I love my dad; my dad and I were so close. So, I got to New York and I meet this man [Arbour] and he became a second father figure to me. He and I had lots of arguments, we had a love-hate relationship. You know, I was with him for 12 years and he taught me so much. His beautiful wife, Claire — they have six kids — they were a very spiritual family and I just loved them. Just absolutely loved them.

He knew how to get everything out of me *laughs*. Yeah, he was bad *laughs*. You know, if you played a great game, he'd tell you you played awful; if you played a terrible game, he'd tell you you played great. So, he was a master psychologist. That's what I will say about Al Arbour.



MW: Who were some of your biggest influences from your tenure with the Islanders and how did they help you on the ice and even in the locker room?

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Bruce Bennett | B Bennett

BB: Well, I know for a fact I wouldn't become the player I did without certain guys, and some guys are going to surprise you, but I was good friends with a guy named **Garry Howatt** who won our first Cup with us [in 1980] and Bobby Nystrom. I was really good friends with the core of our team, **Clark Gillies** — and Clark's still my best friend — but the guys like Garry Howatt and Bobby Nystrom taught me about work, about dedication. Those two guys never get enough credit for what the Islanders became. I just love those two guys. We'd go into a weight room and made you work your ass off and at practice, if you didn't practice as hard as they did, you were in trouble. But, they played in the **American [Hockey] League** for a few years and they came up and they became really core players with the Islanders and— those two guys, to me, meant so much and then, of course, [Gillies] came along and we also had [future Kings captain] **Dave Lewis** and guys like that who just worked so hard, and we never talked about the money. It was obviously great to get more money than we were used to but we just played really hard, Ryan, really hard, and Bobby Nystrom and Garry Howatt made us play really hard.

Then, you get someone like **Bryan Trottier** coming in who was the hardest worker on the team, like **Sidney Crosby**. If the rest of the players aren't playing as hard as the star players, then you got a real problem, but Bryan really helped a lot, too. But, my favourite guy all-time was Clark Gillies. He's my best buddy and he taught me a lot about just going out there and just doing what you can every night. Just a lot of good guys.

MW: From running your own foundation to doing various charity work, you have been keeping busy following your playing career. Could you describe what you've been up to and what advice can you give?

BB: It's a struggle. You know, I do a lot of— I'm very lucky. I get to play in a lot of charity golf tournaments and hockey tournaments and I make some money that way, but it's a struggle. I like to think of myself as a fairly intelligent guy. I can do a lot of things but there's no education. You can't go into a brokerage firm and say,

"I've got this," because they don't hire someone without a degree anymore and things like that, so it's been a struggle.

I just do a lot of charity stuff and we have our own foundation called the '**Bob Bourne & Friends Foundation**' which my oldest son, Jeffrey, is really involved in and my other son, Justin, is in Toronto and just went to three [AHL's Toronto] Marlies games and I have a new grandson down there, so it's been good.

But, it's definitely been different. Without having a degree, I know for a fact– my son, he went and got a scholarship and he got his degree and stuff like that and if I have any advice for anybody, that's what I would say: to let your kids get a scholarship somewhere. But, I'm still doing okay. It's kind of weird, though. Life gets kind of weird as you get older but I got my family and that's all that counts.

Bob Bourne 2014 Induction Video



At 6-foot-3, 200 pounds, Bob Bourne brought size during a time when bigger players weren't as common as they are today. But, it was his blazing speed, focused determination and natural offensive skills that made Bourne such a valuable asset to the New York Islanders. In fact, when Bourne was acquired by the Isles in the summer of 1974, it was one of the earliest moves by GM **Bill Torrey** that ultimately made him look like a genius. **Bart Crashley** and **Larry Hornung**, who had been traded to Kansas City in said trade, did not last with the Scouts. Crashley played in 27 games for the club; Hornung, zero.

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With the Kings, Bourne went on to play 150 games, scoring 20 goals and adding 20 assists. However, while his numbers may not have been as impressive as those of his Islander days, Bob Bourne's leadership helped mold a young Kings squad, which included youngsters **Luc Robitaille** and **Jimmy Carson**, into an up-and-coming threat — the same leadership skills that guided the Islanders during their championship dynasty.

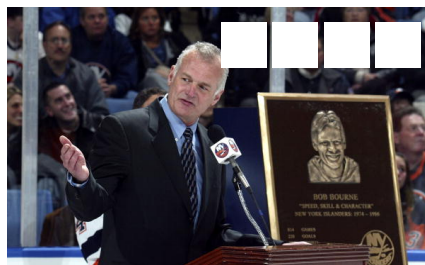
Bob Bourne retired as a veteran of 964 NHL games, during which time he scored 258 goals and added 324 assists for 582 points. Even more impressive, though, were Bourne's playoff numbers. During the postseason, Bourne registering 96 points in 139 postseason games. So, while winning four-straight Stanley Cups may be (most likely) an unbreakable feat today, the same can be especially said for 19-straight playoff series victories, accomplished by the Isles from 1980 to 1984, and thanks, in large part, to Bourne.

To add a personal connection to this, my father had officially quit smoking on **May 17, 1983**, the night the Islanders won for their fourth-straight Cup.

After many attempts to quit smoking, my father, on this night, was ready to go to the store to buy a pack of cigarettes. However, the excitement of the series-clinching Game 4 kept my dad drawn to the TV. During the game, the Islanders jumped out to a 3-0 lead. Their opponents, though, the high-powered **Edmonton Oilers**, had cut their deficit to 3-2. However, coming close to tying the game many times, the Oilers could not solve the goaltending prowess of (1983 **Conn Smythe** winner) **Billy Smith**. Additionally, **Denis Potvin** and **Stefan Persson** pitched in with their defensive efforts along with Bob Bourne, also known for his penalty-killing prowess, as they helped preserve the slim Islanders lead, hanging on to win. As for my father, a long-suffering **Detroit Red Wings** fan, it was the greatest hockey game he had seen in years and, as a result, never smoked again.

In addition, Bourne was an all-star, represented his native Canada at the **1984 Canada Cup** and is a member of both the **New York Islanders Hall of Fame** and the **Saskatchewan Hockey Hall of Fame**.

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It is also notable to mention that Bob Bourne is one of the two most successful players in NHL history to have been drafted and traded in the same summer. The **NHL's** current ironman, **Doug Jarvis**, is the other. In fact, after being traded from Toronto to Montreal, Jarvis would win four-straight Stanley Cups himself, with the **Canadiens** from 1976 to 1979.

In his final season, 1987-88, Bob Bourne was awarded the **Bill Masterton Trophy** (succeeding none other than Doug Jarvis) for his perseverance and in 1987, was named one of **Sports Illustrated's 'Sportsman of the Year'** for his work with a school for disabled children. Bourne's inspiration in **helping disabled children** is inspired by his oldest son, Jeffrey, who was born with **spina bifida**.

As someone who was diagnosed with **cerebral palsy** at an early age, this writer certainly appreciates Mr. Bourne's dedicated to helping disabled children. In fact, Mr. Bourne helped create the aforementioned 'Bourne Family and Friends Foundation', which helps instill healthy lifestyles in youth who experience challenges in accessing opportunities to experience activities.

Speaking with Mr. Bourne, I had the privilege of conversing with a sweet, caring man who, in addition to thinking the world of his family, had nothing but the fondest memories of his playing career. As mentioned, one of the friendships he made was with former Islander teammate Clark Gillies, who, as it happens, ended his playing career with the team on the very same day as Bourne, being claimed off waivers by the **Buffalo Sabres**.

*Photo credit: Bourne
Family and Friends
Foundation*

He was with the Los Angeles Kings at an important time in the franchise's history as his leadership and experience helped influence the promising youth on the club. So, for his contributions to the Kings, Bob Bourne is celebrated as we look back on 50 years of this proud franchise.

For what Bob Bourne is up to these days, I urge all of you to check out the Bourne Family and Friends Foundation **Facebook page** and see what it's all about, what the organization does and even how you can help.

For your service to the Los Angeles Kings, Mr. Bourne, we thank you.

**Special thanks to Justin Bourne for helping me get in touch with his father, ultimately making this interview possible.*
