

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM STEVE BOZEK

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 August 15, 2016



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It is one of the proudest, most iconic moments in **Los Angeles Kings** history.

An inexperienced squad to make a monumental comeback against a juggernaut championship contender was simply unheard of. But that was the case on April 10, 1982 as the Kings, trailing 5-0 late, scored five times in the third period to force overtime and eventually beat the powerhouse **Edmonton Oilers**, giving birth to what will be forever known as 'The Miracle on Manchester.'

While we remember that it was **Daryl Evans** who scored the overtime-winner, his moment would have never come to fruition had the Kings not forced overtime as, looking back on 'The Miracle on Manchester', the man who tied the game in the dying seconds of regulation deserves just as much critical attention. Ladies and gentlemen, that man is **Steve Bozek**.

One of a handful of rookies to suit up for the Kings in 1981-82, Bozek's freshman year saw him scored 33 goals and add 23 assists in 71 regular-season games. But it was his clutch play in the 1982 playoffs that helped garner the Kelowna, B.C., native some serious attention.

With their opening-round series tied at a game apiece, Game 3 shifted to the **The Forum** in Los Angeles where it looked as if the high-powered Oilers were beginning to break away as they dominated the opening two periods to take a commanding 5-0 lead. Little did anyone in the building that night know, however, that history was about to be made.

According to Bozek, though, nothing was said or done in the Kings locker room in the second intermission that foreshadowed any type of comeback.



"No, nothing sticks out in my mind," Bozek said. "Basically, the Oilers had pretty much trounced us all year. I think the average game against the Oilers was like an 8-3 loss for us. I don't remember anything being said. I don't think anyone really thought it was possible. We just went out in the third and it's just one of those crazy things and all of a sudden, every goal we got, we got a little more confident, we started playing a little bit better. There was no inspirational rah-rah speech that, you know, 'Win this one for the Gipper'-type speech that I remember between the second and third period."

After defenseman **Jay Wells** got them on the board, the Kings scored a couple of more times. Yet, despite having their lead shortened, the Oilers not only remained confident, but they became a little too big for their britches.

1982 Edmonton Oilers vs LA Kings - The Miracle on Manchester - Hockey



The 1981-82 Oilers, while they were one of the great teams to have a plethora of future of **Hall-of-Famers** on their roster, were still young and brash. So, even when the Kings were coming back in the third period, they were mocked and laughed at by certain members of the Oilers, including head coach **Glen Sather**.

I asked Bozek if he thought the mockery from the Oilers was unnecessary.



"I would say yes but that was pretty standard," Bozek told me. "We were down 5-0, obviously, after two periods and they had the game completely in hand."

Bozek continued.

"Back then, it was a best-of-five so if they won that game, they were going to have a stranglehold on the series. So, yeah, they were up by five and and they were, at that time, young and pretty brash bunch of guys and they could back it up with their play. But yeah, there was a lot of verbal trash talk going on for sure, especially from their bench. It was just one of those things where it was a little bit like the tide was starting to turn and we managed to get a goal here, a goal there and all of a sudden, they might have tightened up a little bit getting towards the end and basically, we got them off their game a bit there in the third period, obviously scoring five goals and being able to tie it up."

Despite having their once-insurmountable lead cut to two goals, the Oilers still had the momentum and with that, had their share of chances to put the game away, including a couple of breakaways. However, [Kings goaltender] **Mario Lessard** stood his ground, keeping his team in it right until the end.

As key as Lessard's play was, though, it was a crucial high-sticking major late that gave the Kings a golden opportunity not only to score but to force overtime. Edmonton's **Garry Unger** raised his lumber on Kings captain **Dave Lewis** with just a few minutes remaining to give the home team the advantage.

After **Mark Hardy** scored to pull the Kings to within a goal, the stage was set for an exhilarating final minute of regulation.

With Lessard pulled for an extra attacker, the Kings were now two men up, pressing to beat Oilers netminder **Grant Fuhr** in the final 20 seconds.

There, the Kings were relentless. First, **Charlie Simmer** passed from behind the net to **Marcel Dionne**, who was stopped. The puck came loose off the Fuhr save but was corralled by **Jim Fox** who passed it back to the point where the aforementioned Mark Hardy fired a shot on goal before Steve Bozek jumped on the juicy rebound. There, Bozek no mistake to tie the game with just five seconds remaining, scoring what was at that point the most important goal in Kings history.

I asked Bozek about his recollections of his tying goal in the dying seconds.

"My recollections were that it was just a mad scramble," Bozek said. "I didn't know how much time was left on the clock and somebody — I can't remember if it was Mark Hardy or someone — took a shot from the point and I was just standing in front of the net and I believe the rebound just came back to me and it was just kind of a reaction. I just did a backhand and it went past Grant Fuhr and obviously pandemonium broke out."

Bozek's goal sent the game into overtime before Daryl Evans scored from the faceoff dot to Fuhr's left side ended the game, capping off the incredible comeback.

As monumental as their comeback was, though, the Kings lost Game 4, which forced a deciding game back in Edmonton. Yet, while the Kings did win there in Game 1 by a 10-8 count, the Oilers **posted an inconceivable record** of 32-6-4 (regular season and playoffs) at **Northlands Coliseum**. Needless to say, the Kings, despite their momentum, had their work cut out for them for Game 5.

According to Bozek, though, while the Kings were entering hostile territory, the trip back to Edmonton was an unusual one to say the least.

"A little unknown fact was that after we lost the next game, which was Saturday night, we had to go back up to Edmonton to play the fifth game on Sunday and our organization did not have a plane as they [probably] didn't even expect us to get to a fifth game," Bozek revealed. "So, we ended up having to get on the Edmonton Oilers charter plane, to fly back up Saturday night. So, both teams were basically on the same flight going back to Edmonton. So, you got to the airport and [the Oilers] sat on one side of the gate and we sat on the other side of the gate. So, we got on the plane and got to the back of the plane, then they got on the plane and got on the front of the plane.

"I don't think anything like that has probably ever happened in the NHL before or after. Nothing I can think of. So, yeah, I would say that of the two, I think when we went up to Edmonton and [beat them 7-4] on Sunday, we were a much more confident squad and that we could actually win that series at that point, especially after the last game because they barely beat us on Saturday night. So, we were pretty confident that we could go and win that game in Edmonton on Sunday."

During the regular season, the Oilers had dominated the Kings, winning the season series 5-1-2 while, in the process, outscoring them 51-27. Led by **Wayne Gretzky**, who achieved unbreakable league records with 92 goals and 212 points, the Oilers rolled to a 48-17-15 record for second overall while scoring a league-best 417 goals. Yet, the Kings were in the middle of a transition that season. Behind the bench, head coach **Parker MacDonald** resigned, making way for **Don Perry** and a slew of rookies began to make their marks with their new team.

Still, the Kings entered the 1982 playoffs as heavy underdogs to the juggernaut Oilers. Nevertheless, the Kings faced off against the Oilers playing with house money, so to speak.

"You know, I don't think we had any premonitions that we were going to win that series," said Bozek. "We had a bunch of rookies — for instance, myself, Daryl Evans, Bernie Nicholls, Doug Smith — we had a lot of guys that hadn't played in an NHL playoff game. We really had no baggage aside from what had happened during the ^

season and some of those guys like Bernie Nicholls came up towards the end of the season and we had changed coaches. So, we definitely felt like we were a different team at the end of the season than the one who had gotten beaten so badly during the season, so I don't think we had any expectations that it would be anything more than probably three or four games and summer would be starting. But we were certainly ready and had the enthusiasm certainly of youth and putting together our best effort."

While the Kings would be eliminated by the **Vancouver Canucks** in the second round, nothing can take away from the thrill of eliminating the high-powered Edmonton Oilers. To this day, hockey fans overall — let alone Kings fans — talk about 'The Miracle on Manchester' as being arguably the greatest comeback in the sport's history.

Bozek, who would go on to play 11 NHL seasons, summed up the feeling of the victory in a few words.

"It was the first round of the playoffs but it felt like, you know, that game, being down so badly, I can honestly say that for the folks that have participated in sports, you get an incredible win where you're such an underdog."

Dominated by the **Lakers**, **Dodgers** and **Raiders**, the Los Angeles sports scene welcomed the Kings to the fold in the spring of 1982. They may not have been a **Stanley Cup** contender but for one night, the Kings broke the proverbial glass ceiling, instilling the collective hope that, no matter how dire the situation, nothing was impossible.

Some may suggest that he was simply in the right place at the right time but no one can deny that 'The Miracle on Manchester', one of the proudest times in the history of the Los Angeles Kings, would have never come to fruition had it not been for Steve Bozek. So, with that said, we would be remiss if we were to celebrate 50 years of the Los Angeles Kings without recognizing Bozek and his contributions to the club.