

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM GARY SHUCHUK

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 19, 2016



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Despite the playoff thrills the **Los Angeles Kings** have enjoyed early on, they were never able to get very far in their first 25 years of their existence. More specifically, the Kings were never able to get past the second round during this time. In their 26th season, though, things changed.

Despite an inauspicious start to the season, though, with a long-term injury to Wayne Gretzky, the Kings persevered under new head coach **Barry Melrose**. **Luc Robitaille**, who took over the team's captaincy in Gretzky's absence, achieved career-highs with 63 goals and 125 points. Even the goaltending triangle of **Hrudey, Stauber** and **Knickle** stood their ground. But, what Kings fans will most remember about the 1992-93 season is their team's run to the **Stanley Cup Final** — a run made possible by a number of unsung players — one of which was mid-season acquisition, **Gary Shuchuk**.

On January 29, 1993, Shuchuk was traded to the Kings from the **Detroit Red Wings** on January in a six-player trade that included former King **Jimmy Carson** returning to Los Angeles and future Hall-of-Famer **Paul Coffey** bound for the Motor City. Yet, while the aforementioned Carson may have been the key for the Kings in said trade, Shuchuk, who was 25 at the time, had led the **AHL** with 77 points in 47 games for Detroit's then-affiliate, the **Adirondack Red Wings**. But, Shuchuk also had just six games of **NHL** experience when the Kings acquired him.

As an added bonus, Shuchuk's trade to Los Angeles meant a reunion with **Tony Granato**, who were linemates during their college playing days at the **University of Wisconsin**.



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Shuchuk would score two goals and add four assists for the Kings before adding two more tallies that postseason, including a double-overtime-winner against the **Vancouver Canucks** in the opening round.

In this week's edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with Gary Shuchuk, who shares his experience in the Kings' run in '93 and his time overall with the club.

This is Gary Shuchuk's story.

Gary Shuchuk playoff goal in second overtime - Kings at Canucks - 5/12/93



Make Way for the Kings: You joined the Kings in January 1993 when you were traded from Detroit with Jimmy Carson and Marc Potvin. You would go on to play 25 regular-season games and 17 playoff games, known as one of the more underrated Kings that season. How did you feel being with the Kings that year, especially going to the Stanley Cup Final?

Gary Shuchuk: First off, every kid in Canada dreams of being in the Stanley Cup Final, so just getting the opportunity to reach the Stanley Cup Final was a dream come true. It was just a very special time and when you have a very special month like we had beforehand. We had the Final against **Montreal** but the Conference Final we had against **Toronto**, which everybody thought should have been the Stanley Cup [Final], it was incredible. Wayne Gretzky carrying the team on his back in Game 7, **Marty McSorley** and how hard he played and against **Wendel Clark**, a pretty good fight there. Just how anything could happen and leading up to winning in Toronto before we lost to Montreal in the Final. It was such a dream effect because of what happened but it was very special to be a part of that team being that it was the first time ever in Kings history to make it that far. It didn't work out the way we wanted to but still, no regrets at all.

MW: In Los Angeles, you played with a few future Hall-of-Famers, most notably Wayne Gretzky and Jari Kurri. Being from Edmonton and watching them lead the Oilers dynasty in the 80's, how did you feel not only becoming teammates with but playing with them as well? What type of impact did either or both players have on you with the Kings?

GS: Growing up in **Edmonton**, I saw Wayne Gretzky and **Jari Kurri** play, **Charlie Huddy**, too, and being a fan in '84 when [the **Oilers**] won their first Stanley Cup and I want to say that I was one of the first people to go cruising down Jasper Avenue to celebrate that time.

I remember getting that call from [then-Kings head coach] Barry Melrose. **Marc Potvin** and I were on the road when we found out that we'd been traded from Detroit to L.A. We got the phone call at four in the morning and we couldn't sleep anymore because the time difference between California and New York. Then, [Marc and I] talked about who we'd get a chance to play with and when we landed in L.A., one of the first people to greet me was Wayne [Gretzky]. I had never met him before. I had seen him multiple times in Edmonton as a youngster but I never met him and here it is, first time I turn the corner and boom, there's Wayne Gretzky face-to-face, shaking hands, welcoming me to L.A. So, for the next couple of years, I'm sitting across from him, a guy that I idolized growing up and one of the greatest players to ever play the game. Also, for me, being able to play with Jari Kurri and have him almost as a mentor to me, he taught me so much about what to do and how to be a better player and he showed me so much. Just little tidbits on things he shared with me. But one little thing I learned was from those ex-Edmonton Oilers is that they taught me how to be a professional. Those guys came to the rink as pros and when it was time to practice, they practiced hard, and I learned that. You're learned to assume that superstars of that stature would nights off or days off from practices, but I learned from Wayne and Jari that for an hour, an hour-and-a-half, to give it your all and it was no different from when we were on road trips. They had their fun and they knew how to celebrate and have a good time, but they knew when they needed a rest — they got to the hotel and rested — and played their game. So, I took that from them in being a pro and I learned that, that you always got to be ready, and I even teach that as a coach, talking about how these players who practice for an hour, an hour-and-a-half and give it their all and we have a fighting chance.

So, that's the biggest thing I learned but just the idea of those guys being my teammates, we're still friends. I remain in contact with Wayne for hockey stuff, Jari as well, so it was a special bond just playing and getting to know those guys.

MW: Overall, how would you describe your experience with the Kings, not only on the ice but in the community as well?

GS: I think with any organization — the Kings or Detroit — you treat them with a different status, especially during that time going to the Stanley Cup, everyone wanted to be around us and share our experience, but I ^

think the biggest thing the Kings did was **'Tip-A-King'**. There were a lot of things involved but just overall what we did for the community. We'd go to schools, talk to schools to the kids, so I just think that was one of the neatest things to be around. That really helped share our experiences being in the Stanley Cup run. The following year, we got locked out, so I think that's when we really got more of a chance to help out some of the youth organizations, help start a hockey program and just be around the schools more.

I think you need to have a year of a lockout like we went through, but also the time we had in the community, being more involved with the community and share what we do and help some kids.

[Vintage] Gary Shuchuk blasts Cam Russell



Gary Shuchuk would **go on to play** in 136 games for the Kings over the course of four seasons, scoring 12 goals and adding 24 assists during that time. He would then take his career to Europe, playing in Switzerland, Austria and Germany before returning to this side of the Atlantic to finish his playing career — in 2004 as a member of the AHL's **Springfield Falcons**.

In 2010, Shuchuk would return to his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin, where he became an assistant coach for their men's hockey team. Shuchuk would spend five years as a Badgers assistant before moving on



to **Michigan Tech** where he is serving his second season as an assistant coach. In fact, one of Shuchuk's players is Kings prospect **Matt Roy**, a talented defenseman drafted in the seventh-round in 2015. I spoke to Shuchuk about Roy's progress but more on that later.

Photo credit: Michigan Tech

For Kings fans, their team's playoff run in 1993 is one of the many highlights that they will remember for a very long time. Yet, while the Gretzkys, Robitailles and **Blakes** may have led the way in star power, the Kings benefited just as much that spring from the role players: the **Corey Millens**, the **Pat Conachers** and the Gary Shuchuks.

His time in Los Angeles may have been brief, but Gary Shuchuk nonetheless left his mark on the Kings, helping them achieve unprecedented success while making fans believe that their team could, at last, win Lord Stanley's mug. Yet, despite not winning the Stanley Cup, the Los Angeles Kings nonetheless raised a lot of eyebrows while restoring faith in those who were skeptical of their team's success at the beginning of the season, and Gary Shuchuk, for the role he played, should be commended and remembered.