

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS LEGEND MARK HARDY

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 March 29, 2017



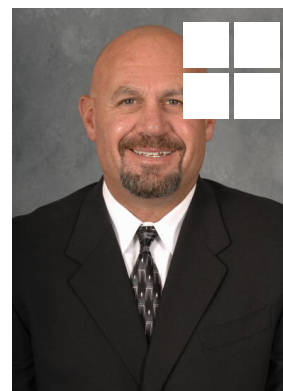
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The **'Miracle on Manchester'**, the run to the 1993 **Stanley Cup Final** and the **'Frenzy on Figueroa'**: arguably the three greatest playoff moments in **Los Angeles Kings** history prior to 2012. Yet, in a time frame that spanned 19 years, there was one man who was with the Kings for all three events.

Serving as a player for two tenures and as an assistant coach for another two, it should go without saying that few know the Los Angeles Kings more than **Mark Hardy**.

However, Hardy's time in southern California has not been limited to the Kings as he also played for the **IHL's Long Beach Ice Dogs**, served as an assistant coach for the **ECHL's Ontario Reign** and even served as the head coach for the **Los Angeles Blades** of since-defunct **Roller Hockey International**. But, it was with the Kings where Hardy, a native of Semaden, Switzerland, established himself as a reliable blueliner, a fan favourite and a formidable fighter, eclipsing the 100-penalty-minute plateau four times during his time in Los Angeles.

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After four years in the **QMJHL** with the **Montreal Juniors**, Hardy was drafted 30th overall by the Kings in 1979 and, despite spending most of his rookie season in the **AHL**, Hardy would become a full-time King for the next seven years. However, after stops in **New York** and **Minnesota**, Hardy would return to the Kings in early 1993, just prior to the club's aforementioned playoff run.

Following his retirement as a player, Hardy would move behind the bench where he has **since made** many stops in his coaching career, including two tours of duty with the Kings. However, an arrest in 2010 led to Hardy's resignation, leaving some to question whether the former defenseman would ever coach again.



Fortunately for Hardy, he was given a second chance as an opportunity to become an assistant coach for the aforementioned Ontario Reign came about. Since then, the former King has not looked back.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with LA Kings alum Mark Hardy, who speaks with us about his playing career in Los Angeles, which includes his experience in the 'Miracle on Manchester', returning to the organization as an assistant coach years and even coaching in nearby Ontario in recent years.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Mark Hardy.

Mark Hardy NHL Career Highlights



Make Way for the Kings: Prior to being drafted by the Kings, you played for the Montreal Juniors of the QMJHL. After an 82-point campaign in 1977-78, you won the Emile Bouchard Trophy as the league's top defenseman. What did winning said award do for your confidence and how did it help you moving forward?

Mark Hardy: Well, I was 18 years old at that time. I had one more year of junior left and I had one of those big years. We had a really good team, so I got to play with some really good players — **Denis Savard** was there. We had a line of three Denis's — Les Trois Denis — so, it was easy to get points on that team and it gave me a lot of confidence going into the next year.

MW: After the Kings drafted you in 1979, you played 15 games with the club while spending the rest of the year with the AHL's Binghamton Dusters. The next season, though, you returned to the Kings and

remained there for the next seven-plus seasons. What can you tell us about your first stint with the Kings and what helped turn you into a full-time player the following year?

MH: Well, I think– I started the year there with the Kings and was really happy and remember getting on a plane flying into Binghamton. Going from L.A. to Binghamton really took a toll on me at first. I hated leaving [Los Angeles] obviously but I wasn't ready to play in the NHL and I realized that I had to go down [to Binghamton] and work hard and at the end of the [1979-80 season], I got called up for the playoffs and we played against the Islanders and [the Kings] had told me that I had to workout a lot harder in the summer. Well, I worked out very, very hard that summer, put on 15 pounds and came back with a lot of confidence and a lot of vengeance and told myself that I wasn't going back to the minors again and wasn't going back to Binghamton. So, I did whatever I could to stay [in Los Angeles].

MW: Arguably the Kings' greatest comeback is "The Miracle on Manchester". As best as you can, take us through not only what that game was like but the entire series. You were up against a juggernaut, so to speak, in the Edmonton Oilers so, on paper, any type of comeback would have been deemed insurmountable. Nevertheless, you and the Kings pulled off the comeback and ultimately won the series. Describe your memories of said series.

MH: We went into Edmonton and started the series there and ended up winning the first game. We had supposedly no chance to beat [the Oilers], so that was a huge win for us. They won the next one and then came back to L.A. and I think they beat us and then 'The Miracle on Manchester' happened.

I think the hatred that we had– I think both teams hated each other and I think that was a big part of us winning that game. They had us down 5-0 going into the third period and they were heckling us, laughing at us and right before we went into the third period — it was at the end of the second period — [fellow Kings defenseman] **Jay Wells** had a huge hit on **Dave Semenko** and I think that gave us some life. [Wells] even ended up scoring the first goal as well as we came out of the first period there and, you know, as the third period went along, [the Oilers] had three or four breakaways that could have gone in but [then-Kings goaltender] **Mario Lessard** came up big for us and there were plays where the puck was going in our net and Mario was out of net, it would have hit our skate. So, that 'Miracle' played itself out and you can see why it was a miracle, that we came back from a 5-0 deficit and **Daryl Evans** scoring the winning goal in overtime, so I think that hatred [against the Oilers] really drove us through that series.

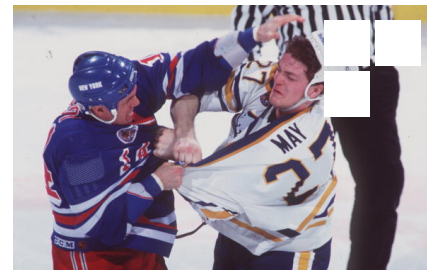
Photo courtesy of NHL.com

MW: After spending your entire career with the Kings, they had traded you to the New York Rangers in February 1988. What can you tell us about being traded, especially considering it was for the first time[^]

in your professional career?

MH: Yeah, it was devastating. I remember we had a 'Skate with the Kings' party and I was skating around with all the fans and I got called in right after the skate and [Kings management] had told me that I had been traded to the New York Rangers and I can remember going– driving home from Culver City back to my house and I had tears in my eyes. I think when you play for that first team, you bleed the colours so much and I had been [in Los Angeles] for a long time and I was leaving a lot of friends, but I think when I got to New York, I knew it would be a new chance for me and I got right in there and we [the Rangers] had a very good finishing record. We missed the playoffs by one point that year, had a really good finish with them and we had a good team in New York and after a few days of sulking, I really got back into it. It was fun playing in **Madison Square Garden**, the fans there were unbelievable and they took a liking to me there.

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Rick Stewart

MW: After your playing career, you returned to the Kings in 1999 where you spent five years as an assistant coach. Could you tell us about some of your memories there, such as the 2001 playoff upset of Detroit or the 2002-03 campaign where the Kings lost a record 56 man games to injury?

MH: Well, I think the playoff game there [Game 6; 2001 series vs. Detroit] where we scored in overtime to beat them– I can remember the feeling that we had when **Adam Deadmarsh** scored that final goal and he was also known for playing very well against the Detroit Red Wings. It was a hard-fought battle, it was a big, big win for us and I just remember shaking [then-Red Wings head coach] **Scotty Bowman**'s hand at the end there and he said, "You guys did a good job," so that meant a lot to us for a guy like Scotty Bowman telling us that we'd done a good job and our team played so hard. We were down 3-0 [in Game 4] and we ended up winning that one, too, so that was a huge, huge win.

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You know, I think that was what 'The Miracle on Manchester' did for me: No matter the score in the games, you always know that you have a chance to come back if the team can play hard and can play well together and dig down.

It doesn't matter what the score is and I think the same thing in life: Whatever happens to you in life, you can keep fighting and fight back and fight for what you believe and hopefully people will give you another chance.

MW: Your coaching career in southern California was not limited to the Kings. In recent years, you served as an assistant for the ECHL version of the Ontario Reign and before joining the Kings, you were an assistant for the IHL's Long Beach Ice Dogs as well as spending a year with the Roller Hockey

International's Los Angeles Blades. Could you take us through those experiences? What are some of your fondest memories with those clubs?

MH: Well, one of my fondest memories, for sure, was I didn't know if I'd ever be coaching again and then our [Ontario Reign] owner, **Justin Kemp**, felt that I was a good person and a good coach and he gave me the chance to coach again. It was always my dream to get back into coaching again and I had to sit out for a year — some things happened to me — and I was just honoured that he gave me the opportunity to coach again and I coached with an outstanding coach [in Ontario] in **Jason Christie** and we had some really good teams there. We had three years that were very, very successful, we averaged about 8,000 fans a game in Ontario and I was just thrilled to be back coaching again doing what I love to do.

MW: What was it like coaching in the RHI?

MH: Oh, it was fun. I had a good time. Our owner was **Jeanie Buss** back then and I didn't know if I was going to take the job or not. It was one of my first— it was my first coaching job really and I just had a blast. We had a really good team there and Jeanie was an awesome person to work for. She gave us everything we needed to win and— we didn't get the championship but we had a very successful two years there, so I had a blast.

Ontario Reign - Mark Hardy Reflects on LA Kings Miracle on Manchester



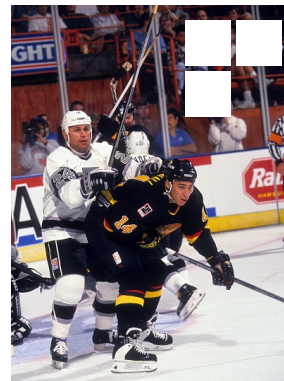
He played 616 total games for the Los Angeles Kings, which **is good enough** for 11th on the club's all-time list. Add his games as an assistant coach to that list and Mark Hardy would have nearly 1,300 games with the Kings organization under his belt. During **his playing career** with the Kings, Hardy scored 53 goals and added 250 assists to go along with 858 penalty minutes.

However, when Hardy left the Kings in 2010, it was under unpleasant circumstances.

Shortly following the Kings' 2010 playoff exit, Hardy resigned from his post as one of the club's assistant coaches **after he was** charged with fourth-degree sexual abuse. It was a dark time for Hardy as **he had been** struggling with alcoholism at this juncture in his life, suddenly finding himself lying on a steel bed in a jail cell.

Thankfully for the former King, he had the support of his family and former teammates to help him through such a difficult period. With that said, though, it was uncertain whether Hardy would — or could — return to the coaching ranks. Fortunately, in 2011, Justin Kemp, owner of the ECHL's Ontario Reign, **came calling**.

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As the former blueliner previously mentioned, Mr. Kemp knew Hardy was a good person and a good coach as Justin's father, Bruce, owned the IHL's **Los Angeles Ice Dogs** — whom Hardy served as a player-coach for in 1995-96. With that said, the younger Kemp found it worthwhile to take a chance on the former Kings assistant and his chance paid off as Hardy helped the Reign win two division titles in his three seasons behind the club's bench.

Hardy then moved onto to Chicago where he was an assistant coach (along with fellow former Kings defenseman in **Darryl Sydor**) with the AHL's **Wolves** for two seasons before joining the newly-relocated **Tucson Roadrunners'** staff this season.

Photo credit: TSN.ca

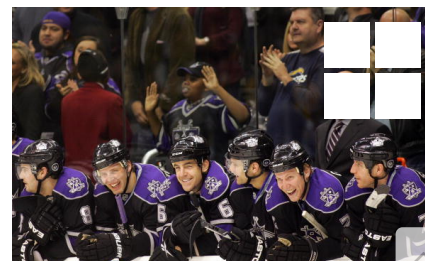
Having relocated from Springfield, Mass. last summer, the Roadrunners were set to have a celebratory inaugural season in the desert. Unfortunately, any excitement **would be overshadowed** by a scary incident involving team captain **Craig Cunningham**, who, prior to a game on November 19, 2016, collapsed on the ice during warmups. The centreman was rushed to hospital havin suffered acute cardiac arrest.

Yet, while Cunningham's life was saved that night and his road to recovery is a smooth one, the Roadrunners were nonetheless shaken up by the incident, including Hardy.

Overall, though, Mark Hardy is thriving.

After a 15-year NHL career as a player, Hardy was blessed to find a second career as a coach as his players have benefited from his experience and thriving themselves as a result. Beyond his work behind the bench, though, Mark Hardy should be especially commended for what he has done in his

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Victor Decolonaon

personal life to battle alcoholism and have the resolve to return to what he loves doing.

As we look back on a half century of Los Angeles Kings hockey, we celebrate a man who has dedicated so much of his hockey life to this proud organization. Whether he was a player or a coach, Mark Hardy made a lasting impact on the Kings franchise — one that will never be forgotten or never go unappreciated. For that, we thank Mr. Hardy.

He deserves it.

**Special thanks to Tom Callahan of the Tucson Roadrunners for not only making this interview possible but for also helping me conduct it.*