

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM ROBB STAUBER

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 September 27, 2016



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Before 2012, there was 1993. In terms of playoff success, no year was more symbolic of **Stanley Cup** aspirations than 1993 was. That playoff year brought a great amount of joy, but a fair bit of heartbreak as well, to a franchise and a fanbase longing for a championship.

Over the course of history in any sport, very few teams have won championships with a roster chock full of all-stars – a small list that does not include the 1992-93 **Los Angeles Kings**.

Starting off the year without **Wayne Gretzky**, only a small handful of experts Embed from Getty Images gave the Kings a chance to make the playoffs, much less make the Stanley Cup Final. But with a rookie coach in **Barry Melrose** to a leader in **Luc Robitaille** to a plethora of underrated but celebrated role players, the silver-and-black spent the 1992-93 campaign raising more eyebrows than criticism.

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Just as vital to the Kings' success that season were the contributions in goal.

While **Kelly Hruddy** had already established himself as the team's starter, he wound up discovering a reliable partner in a 24-year-old native of Duluth, Minnesota, by the name of **Robb Stauber**.

Drafted by the Kings in the sixth round of the 1986 Draft, Robb Stauber would spend the next three seasons playing for his alma mater, the University of Minnesota, before seeing his first bit of action in the NHL – and then, it was only two games. But for Stauber, the recipient of the prestigious **Hobey Baker Award** in 1988, he would return to Los Angeles in time for the start of the 1992-93 season and stay on a full-time basis, recording



a 15-8-4 record with a 3.84 goals-against average in 31 games, in addition to four playoff outings – numbers that were superior to Hruddy's.

But Stauber's first full season with the Kings didn't come without its challenges.

That and much more is discussed in **Make Way for the Kings'** interview with Robb Stauber in a continuation of our exclusive '**Royal Reflections'** series.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is Robb Stauber.

Robb Stauber's Goalcrease Highlights and goalie traini...



Make Way for the Kings: What is your earliest memory as a member of the Los Angeles Kings?

Robb Stauber: One of my earliest memories– well, a lot of great memories with one of the most obvious being getting to play in Los Angeles at a time when hockey was really just starting to get very popular in the area. It's obvious to say that Wayne Gretzky was the big draw and being able to be with the organization at that time was just– you know, at the end of the day, it was just electrifying. It was just such a great time to be playing hockey in southern California.



MW: You were drafted by the Kings in 1986 but didn't see your first game until 1990 before joining them full-time for the 1992-93 season. Describe the road you took to get to Los Angeles.

RS: Oh, sure. Yes, I was drafted in '86 by the Kings. I was an 18-year-old out of

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high school hockey in Minnesota, I spent three years playing at the

University of Minnesota and ultimately turning pro in 1989-90, signing a

contract with the Kings and foregoing my senior year in college. I was

eventually able to make the Kings in 1992-93 having spent the first two-and-

a-half or three years in their minor-league system in New Haven, Connecticut



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with the **[AHL's] Nighthawks**, then briefly with the **[IHL's] Phoenix Roadrunners**, so I spent some time but

not a lot. Then, ultimately in 92-93, getting the chance to make the National Hockey League team, it was

honestly quite a run that year going to the **Stanley Cup Final**, that was just— well, if I step back a little bit, my

first games were in 1990. I played against **Winnipeg** and **Calgary** but I had a very difficult start. I had been

hurt most of the season and when I was cleared to play, I went to New Haven with the Nighthawks for a couple

of weeks and after just two weeks, I was called up by the Kings. At that time, they were having some

goaltending injury issues so, fortunately, I was able to get a couple games under my belt. As I said, they didn't

go very well and I honestly think at that time that maybe management lost a little bit of confidence after that

very shaky start and from there, I spent the next three seasons in the minors just trying to build my game and

become a better goalie.

MW: Also in 1992-93 in Los Angeles, one of your assistant coaches was former netminder Cap Raeder.

Describe the impact he had on your career early on. What did he do to help you mature as a goaltender?

RS: Well, it was great. Obviously **Cap** having the experience he had with the Kings. I think the

biggest thing with Cap did to help the goalies — not only myself but all the boys — he was

always very honest about where you were at in your development. He never sugarcoated

anything which was good quite frankly because, at the end of the day, all you needed was

the truth and where you're at and how you're playing. Cap was always very up-front and it

was always good for having a trusting relationship with your assistant coach knowing that he

would tell you where you're standing and what he thought of your play at that time. So, we

thought that was really beneficial.

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MW: While you were a regular with the Kings at that juncture, the 1992-93 season also saw the Kings bring in Rick Knickle who ended up making quite a few starts despite coming up from the lowest level of the minors. Describe your mindset during that time.

RS: I recall that clearly. My mindset was initially– I was disappointed that, at that time, between the coaching staff and the management, they felt they needed to bring in another goalie that could maybe get the job done on a regular basis and provide something for the team that, at that time, provided something that maybe I wasn't able to provide. You know, it was a mindset of disappointment but disappointment only lasts so long. I mean the reality is that– it wasn't like I felt sorry for myself or anything like that. Just get on the ice and try to make yourself better every day. You know, at the end of the day, for me, the mindset I try to approach every day was just make your game better, become a better goalie and things will generally work themselves out. So, initially disappointment but that kind of wore off and just got back to work and try to make myself a better goaltender.

MW: That season, the Kings made a run to their first Stanley Cup Final. What are some of your fondest memories of that season?

RS: Well, overall, it really was just a special season. You ask anybody who was on that team, that it was such an interesting, unique team. We just seemed to fire on all cylinders even though we may not have been the best regular season team, we were a pretty close-knit team and players got along very well and we really enjoyed going to the rink. Obviously, Barry Melrose was a rookie coach and he brought in a lot of energy into the locker room. His coaching philosophy and style, a guy that really rewarded preparation and hard work and you were rewarded for that, and if you were resilient as a player and you were able to bounce back from difficulties, if you were able to focus through tough times, Barry took note of those types of things and that's all you could ever ask for as a player: having a coach like that. I understand that you're going to go through tough times but you work at it, you work at getting better, keep a positive attitude and at some point, you'll be rewarded for that.

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So, it was really an incredible season. So many great moments — almost too many to describe — obviously Game 7 in Toronto where Wayne [Gretzky] had that incredible game, pretty much put the team on his back that night, scoring three goals. Just an incredible way to move into the Stanley Cup Final and, well, I think we all know what happened in the Final as it didn't work out in our favour but it was one heck of a season with many great memories.

Kings @ Leafs Game 7 Highlights



MW: You were known as an aggressive netminder so much that you had the nickname 'Blueline'. Who coined that moniker for you and what prompted you to become such an aggressive goaltender?

RS: I believe it was Jim Rome who came up with it. You know, a pretty creative mind to come up with that tagline and once he came up with it, it just stuck and that was my nickname.

But as far as developing that style, it's just something that evolved over time. It didn't start when I was a pro, it didn't start when I was in college, it actually started when I was really just a kid. It was when I was 12 or 13 years old when I really started to experiment with my game. Back then, in the early 80's, I was just a kid then and we didn't really have- there weren't goalie coaches. You just had to figure things out on your own. So, I kept some things and eventually found things that worked in my game and I'm sure there were some things that worked and you try to perfect those things that were working for you. So, the reality is that [becoming an aggressive goaltender] started when I was around 13 years old and I just got better and better at it to the point where it became natural. When I was aggressive, I rarely hesitated, rarely had any fear of playing that way and that's just the way I played.

MW: You played collegiately at the University of Minnesota, famously associated with the late Herb Brooks who coached there for many years. Did you ever cross paths with Herb Brooks while you were at Minnesota? If so, describe the impact he had on you.

RS: Actually, Herb had been gone from the University of Minnesota while I was there just by a few years. But I remember when I was coached by him when I was a senior in

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high school. I think most people recall Herb Brooks from the 'Miracle on Ice' team as being a real motivating coach and he would challenge players and I know in 1986, he was coaching one of our all-star teams that was playing — we were playing all over the country at that time — and Herb was our head coach, his son Danny was on our team. Herb came up to me after one of your games in Chicago, in fact. After the game, I had always liked to challenge shooters, which I had so often, and so often it worked out very well, but Herb said to me after the game, "Stauber, you can't play that way," and I



Bruce Bennett
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thought to myself that here's one of the greatest coaches of all-time — 1980 Olympic coach, gold-medalist, three national championships at Minnesota, also a coach in the National Hockey League — my first thought was, "Well, I'm sure you're a really good coach — I mean, that's obvious — but I know how to stop a puck." Now, that's what I'm thinking internally. I never said anything to him, but I've got to tell you an interesting story:

I have always wanted to ask Herb — and I knew him well enough being from Minnesota and knowing his son — but Herb was a very quiet guy. We actually, Herb and I, belonged to the same country club in Minneapolis for, oh gosh, it was probably 10 years and I would see him golfing and I would just see him in passing — and that was Herb — but I had always wanted to ask Herb— I had always felt the day he said, "You can't play that way," he was more interested in how I would take it rather than him actually believing it just from the way he motivated players. It always stuck with me. I always wanted to ask, "Did you say that because you believed it or were you just trying to motivate me?" He was so good at motivating players to be their best and so I— it was August [2003] and it was two weeks before he passed away.

He was at the golf club having lunch with his wife and two of his good friends. I had just finished playing golf so I was sitting by myself having lunch and Herb was literally at the next table across from me and he was enjoying his lunch — him and his wife Patti — and then they're walking away and Herb is the last one to leave, then he stops. So, he comes over and he starts talking to me, and I'm thinking, "This is the first time ever," and we're talking and he's talking about potentially taking the— I think it was the (New York) Ranger job again — he was talking about the opportunity to get back into NHL coaching, wasn't sure if he was going to do it, talked about [then-Ranger Jaromir] Jagr and I'm just listening to him. You know, we had a very nice talk which lasted about five or 10 minutes and Herb had never, ever done that before and I really wished that I would have asked him at that moment in time, asking him, "You know Herb, back in '86, you said I couldn't play that way and I always wanted to know whether or not you really meant that."

Well, you know, sadly enough, two weeks later, he's passed away and, you know, to me, it was really interesting that was the first time in his life that he really— I mean it's not like we didn't say hi to each other before — but he actually stopped and came to the table to talk hockey, and it was really cool. He was telling me that he

wasn't going to take the NHL job as he wasn't sure he wanted to deal with high-end players with egos and he was telling me that he wasn't sure that that's what he wanted to do. Then unfortunately, like I said, two weeks later, he wasn't with us. I mean, I have some great memories of how I remember him and some really neat stories that I have.

MW: Since 2009, you have been working with the U.S. Women's National Team where you focus on coaching and the development of its goaltenders. Describe some of the methods you teach that you were taught during your playing career. What type of feedback do you get from your goaltenders and fellow coaches?

RS: That's a good question. You know, I really try to bring a broad range of ideas to the table, seeing how goalies play the game, how they see the game, and I can just say that in a very small way, I want our goalies to develop in a mindset of more than— look, being a great puck-stopper is great and if you can stop the puck at a really high level and you want to be one of the best in the world, that's great — but what I want to do is challenge you in another way is not to be just a puck-stopper but a quarterback. Back there [as a quarterback], you make a difference in the game not only with the ability of how to stop the puck or you see the game but how you can be active with your skills and stick, how you can make a difference on forechecks and ultimately, I would like for them to see themselves as a puckstopper plus a quarterback in football — he has a football in his hand is such a difference-maker and so is the goalie who can stop the puck. Ultimately, there are different things you can do back there that make a difference between winning and losing and I just really try to get them to think about the position in that way — how they can affect the outcome not only by stopping the puck but how they see the game.

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Robb Stauber's Aggressive Goaltending Highlights



He would play over the course of four seasons in the National Hockey League but Robb Stauber's overall hockey career has been one worth celebrating.

From his collegiate success at the University of Minnesota as both a player and as a coach — which includes seven seasons as the program's goaltending coach — to adopting an aggressive playing style which has been acquired by many netminders since, Robb Stauber is, in many respects, a trailblazer. In addition, Stauber's work with the U.S. Women's National Team has been an instrumental force in maintaining the club's stance as one of the premier nations in women's hockey.

As an added bonus, for those of you who are either hoping to be a goaltender or would like to better your game as a goaltender, Stauber has many beneficial instructional videos on YouTube, including this one:

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While his career with the Kings only lasted a short while, Robb Stauber's legacy in Los Angeles is one that is still revered as a player who would find himself in the play at the blueline — hence the nickname — but for a person who was genuine and down-to-earth whether fans had the pleasure of meeting him at a team function, at a practice or on the street.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Los Angeles Kings, we celebrate the legacy of Robb Stauber.

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