

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM WAYNE SIMMONDS

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 March 24, 2017



Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo credit: Mike Zampelli

In recent years, fans of the **Los Angeles Kings** became habitually coveted with excitement when June approached. After all, between 2012 and 2014, it was the time of the year when their team contended for a spot in the **Stanley Cup Final**. But, there was also something stimulating about June for Kings fans between 2007 and 2009 as well, albeit for different reasons altogether.

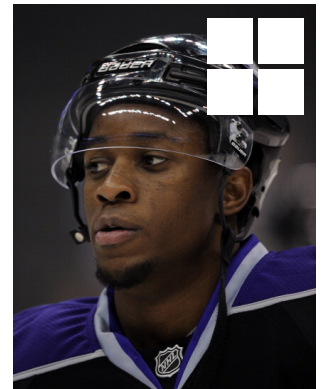
Early in the **Dean Lombardi** era, there was a collective frustration for Kings fans as they watched their team put forth less-than-stellar efforts on a fairly regular basis. However, many of these long-suffering, not to mention patient, fans remained confident, knowing that their team would soon not only return to the playoffs but contend for a Stanley Cup. They just needed to believe that, unlike previous rebuilding years, Kings management were drafting the right pieces towards their inevitable success — and they did.

After having nine draft selections in 2006, the Kings had 10 in 2007, owning three of the first 61 picks in the latter year.

After taking **Thomas Hickey** fourth overall and **Oscar Moller** at the 52nd spot, the Kings used the 61st pick to select a naturally-athletic, physical 18-year-old by the name of **Wayne Simmonds**.

Upon being drafted by the Kings, Simmonds had one season of major junior hockey under his belt, **scoring** 23 goals and 49 points in 66 games for the **OHL's Owen Sound Attack**. He even racked up 112 penalty minutes, flaunting his fearless demeanor which went in hand with his 6-foot-2 frame.

Embed from Getty Images



Getty Images Sp...
Harry How



Embed from Getty Images

Getty Images ...
Thearon W. He...

After returning to the OHL for the 2007-08 season, Simmonds joined the Kings to begin the 2008-09 campaign — one that was the beginning of something special in Los Angeles.

Joining the Kings with fellow rookies (the aforementioned) **Oscar Moller** and the newly-drafted **Drew Doughty**, Wayne Simmonds was determined to help turn his new team, accustomed to being the NHL's proverbial basement-dwellers, into a championship contender. Simmonds need not have worried as he fit right in, scoring nine goals and 23

assists while playing in all 82 games in his rookie season while dropping the gloves on more than a few occasion to fire up his team.

Despite establishing himself as a physical force on the ice and as a fan favourite off the ice, Simmonds was traded to the **Philadelphia Flyers** in June 2011 in a deal that would help the Kings win two Stanley Cups in the next three years. However, it was in his new home where Simmonds would elevate his game, being known already for his energy and hard work ethic in addition to his knack for scoring timely goals. Yet, it was just this past year when Simmonds became an all-star for the first time in his career, ultimately winning **All-Star Game MVP** honours in, of all places, Los Angeles.

In this edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we speak with former King Wayne Simmonds who tells us about being drafted by the Kings, his relationship with Dean Lombardi and which teammate he benefited most from in Los Angeles.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Wayne Simmonds.

Wayne Simmonds First NHL Goal



Make Way for the Kings: You were drafted 61st overall by the Kings in 2007 and made your debut in 2008. While they weren't a playoff team just yet, the Kings had an exciting young team on the rise with, among others, the newly-drafted Drew Doughty. How did it feel entering training camp that year and even starting the season? Was there a palpable feeling that this team was quickly going to draw a lot of critical attention?

Wayne Simmonds: So, I was drafted in 2007 and I was lucky enough to make the team in 2008 coming out of camp as a 20-year-old. So, you know, it was a really young team at that time and I think before that point, the Kings weren't doing well but they had some good pieces in place with **Anze Kopitar, Dustin Brown, Jonathan Quick** was drafted in the system, so he had a bright future ahead of him — you could tell that from the start. You know, for me, I think I was just happy to be able to help the team as a 20-year-old just to go into the season.

MW: You were drafted by Dean Lombardi who was still at the beginning of his rebuilding plan. How did you get along with Lombardi and how did he treat you upon being drafted?

WS: Me and Dean got along really well. I was there every summer. I had a lot of time to spend with him and a lot of one-on-one time and *laughs* I know he was pretty hard on me but I think when you're a young guy coming into the league, most GMs are hard on their young guys. They want to make sure that [those players are] playing the game the right way, doing things the right way, living their life the right way and I got nothing but respect for the man.

Embed from Getty Images



Getty Images Sport
Bruce Bennett

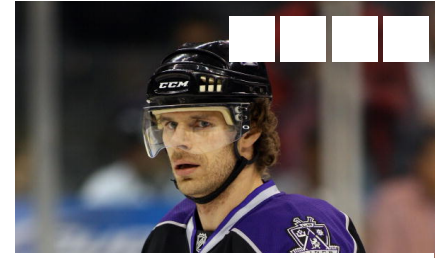
MW: While in Los Angeles, your coach was Terry Murray. Could you describe Murray's coaching style and how important was his presence not only on the bench but in the locker room as well?

WS: Terry was another guy who was extremely tough on the young guys. He was a no-nonsense type of guy. I remember going back and— if I made one mistake, I'd be sitting on the bench for the rest of the game. I remember him telling me, "You know, these other older guys, they have the experience, they can afford to make more mistakes than you and you got to be perfect pretty much if I want to play," so I kind of took that to heart and I try to apply it to my game now.

MW: Of all your teammates in Los Angeles, which players did you benefit most from and how?

WS: I played with **Michal Handzus** for three years solid. He was my center for all three years and I can definitely say that he had a big impact on me in the way I played the game and just the little things in becoming a professional.

Embed from Getty Images

Getty Images Sport
Victor Decolongon

Also, **Ryan Smyth** as well. He came on board in my second year and I definitely picked his mind a lot, worked with him after practice on the whole tipping and the net-front presence. So, I think without those two guys, I wouldn't be where I was and I mean those two guys were huge for my career.

MW: The Kings traded you and Brayden Schenn to the Flyers in June 2011. How did it feel being traded and how excited were you to start a new chapter in Philadelphia?

WS: It was kind of a surprise. It was a little bit weird. I thought I would be a King for a long time. I think that's what every player thinks when they come into the league, and then you quickly realize that this is business. There were no hard feelings or anything like that but I'm actually happy I was traded to Philadelphia. If I wasn't traded to Philadelphia, I definitely wouldn't be the player I am. I definitely got the chance here to spread my wings and explore different parts of my game. But yeah, it was pretty shocking when I got traded.

MW: In January, you won MVP honours at the All-Star Game in Los Angeles. How did it feel being recognized as the game's MVP and how special was it being in the home of your former team in front of many fans who still love you to this day?

WS: For me, it was my first All-Star Game, so being selected— just to be an all-star in [the **NHL**] with so many great players in the league and so many great players on my team who I think could've been chosen, it was a real honour for me and I think it made it that much more special than it was in Los Angeles. So, the whole experience for me was pretty surreal, but I definitely enjoyed my time and I got a pretty good ovation from the crowd and, you know, it was kind of a storybook ending. Obviously, it's not over, my career's not over — I'm still going here — but I'm definitely thankful to the Los Angeles Kings and happy to be a Flyer.

Embed from Getty Images

Getty Images Sport
Harry How

2009 LA KINGS ALL STAR COMMERCIAL



While the Kings did receive a solid centerman in **Mike Richards** in return, the trading of Simmonds (along with **Brayden Schenn**) didn't sit well with some fans in Los Angeles. The displeasure was nothing against Richards but rather it was a testament to how much Kings fans loved Simmonds — and they had every reason to feel that way. After all, from his aforementioned work ethic on the ice to his personality off the ice and even on screen with his acting prowess (please refer to the above video), Wayne Simmonds was not an easy player to part with.

Embed from Getty Images



Getty Images Sport
Harry How

For someone who perhaps did his best offensive work in front of the net, Simmonds was also great at working his magic on both sides of the special teams department. But, one team's loss was another team's gain as the native of Scarborough, Ontario, has since established himself as one of the game's premier offensive threats, hitting the 60-point plateau twice in his previous three seasons while scoring 28 or more goals in each of those campaigns while with the Flyers. In fact, his 29 goals and 49 points thus far only proves that Wayne Simmonds is only maximizing the prime of his career.

In his three seasons in Los Angeles, Wayne Simmonds **scored** 39 goals and 54 assists for 93 points while racking up 264 penalty minutes, sending a message that his team, once notorious for being proverbial doormats, if you will, would not be taken lightly anymore. Also as a King, Simmonds was reliable in more ways than one as he missed a grand total of just six games in his three seasons with the club.



Wayne Simmonds helped turn the attitude in Los Angeles into a winning one and while the Kings did win two Stanley Cups with the aforementioned Mike Richards, fans of the silver-and-black cannot help but wonder how their team would fare if Wayne Simmonds remained, or even returned.

Embed from Getty Images

Getty Images Sport
Bruce Bennett

Whether it was said Stanley Cup wins or not, there isn't that palpable bitterness that comes with missing Wayne Simmonds in Los Angeles. Many, if not most, Kings fans are happy that their former star is enjoying great success in the **City of Brotherly Love** and were even thrilled when he was named **Most Valuable Player** at this year's All-Star Game in Los Angeles. With that said, though, Simmonds' efforts with the Kings have never gone unappreciated.

Embed from Getty Images

Getty Images Sport
Jeff Gross

Remembering Wayne Simmonds and his time with the Kings brings back the memories of a team on the cusp of greatness. 2008 will forever symbolize a time when it felt great to be a Kings fan again and for that, we can thank so many: Dean Lombardi, Drew Doughty, even **Jarret Stoll**. However, we would be remiss if we didn't reflect on Wayne Simmonds and his contributions in helping the Kings move from, so to speak, the outhouse to the penthouse.

His time in Los Angeles may not have been as long as many would have hoped but Wayne Simmonds nonetheless made his time with the Kings count — and that time will forever be remembered as one of the most special junctures in the team's proud history.

Wayne Simmonds, we tip our caps to you.

**Special thanks to Zack Hill of the Philadelphia Flyers for his contributions in making this interview possible.*