

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM SIMON GAGNE

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 September 6, 2016



Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo credit: Debora Robinson

From **Mike Richards** and **Jeff Carter** to **Dean Lombardi** and **John Stevens**, the association between the **Los Angeles Kings** and **Philadelphia Flyers** was significant in recent years. Whatever the reasons were behind so many players and coaches going from one city to the other, there is no denying just how much it benefited the Kings in 2011 and 2012.

Fresh off acquiring the aforementioned Mike Richards, the Kings made a rare, early free-agent splash in the summer of 2011 when they inked ex-Flyer **Simon Gagne** to a two-year deal.

Embed from Getty Images



Getty Images Sport
Harry How

An 11-year NHL veteran by this time, Gagne had spent the first 10 years of his career with the Flyers where, in his last season (2009-10), helped lead them to their first **Stanley Cup Final** since 1997. The following season, Gagne would help lead the **Tampa Bay Lightning** to within one game of reaching the Stanley Cup Final. But for the native of Ste. Foy, Quebec, as great as he was, he was also notorious for his injuries. In fact, when Gagne did sign with the Kings, he had played in 70-plus games just once in his previous four seasons. Yet, while some fans may have been reluctant to see the Kings sign Gagne due to his injury woes, many more were excited to see their team add the veteran presence of a player who was still, for all intents and purposes, one of the premier players in the game.

While injuries did limit Gagne to just 34 games in his first season with the Kings, Gagne's presence nonetheless was a key factor in helping the silver-and-black get over the top as they defeated the **New Jersey Devils** in six games for the franchise's first Stanley Cup title.



As part of MakeWayfortheKings' exclusive 'Royal Reflections' series, we spoke with Simon Gagne where he told us what motivated him to sign in Los Angeles, what he felt he brought to the table and, of course, what it was like to win the Stanley Cup — the first not only for the Kings but for Gagne personally.

This is Simon Gagne.



Make Way for the Kings: While by 2011 you were at the tail end of your career, you signed with the Los Angeles Kings with plenty to offer. From Dean Lombardi, John Stevens and Ron Hextall to name just three, there were a number of connections between the Kings and Flyers. How much of a factor — if at all — did this play in your signing with the Kings in 2011? What other factors were at play in your decision?

Simon Gagne: Well, first of all, one of the reasons I had connections with the L.A. Kings at that time was being good friends with Justin Williams, who I spoke with during that summer since I was a free agent at that time. If you remember, the Kings made a trade and decided to get Mike Richards. So, I had some friends and having Ron Hextall there and a couple of other people from the Flyers, and even Dean Lombardi used to be a pro



scout with the Flyers when I was there. So, that definitely helped me to decide that season to go to the Kings and at that time, they had a good shot to win the Stanley Cup; maybe not the first year but maybe the second year that I was going to be there.

MW: Known as a quality two-way winger who could skate very well, what specific areas did you feel you could bring to Los Angeles and help them contend for a Stanley Cup?

SG: I thought the Kings had really good depth first of all. Also, bringing the experience that I had — the playoffs with the Flyers, going to the Stanley Cup Final with them in 2010 against the **(Chicago) Blackhawks** where we lost Game 6 in overtime. All that plus, like you said, the way I could play both sides of the ice, being a winger that could play on both the left and the right side, ability to play on the first, second, third and even the fourth line, I thought it was a perfect situation for me to go [to Los Angeles].

MW: As great a player as you were, there was some reticence in regards to your injury history, including concussions. How motivated were you to prove the skeptics wrong, so to speak?

SG: Well, injuries are always going to be part of the game. On my side unfortunately, I had some big injuries, especially concussions in my career in the past. You do think about that on the one side but on the other side, you're a hockey player and that's what you love to do. You want to go forward and not think too much about it and, like you said, you want to show that you can play as much as you can, go through it and not be injury-free for most of the game but, at the same time, you never know what can happen on the ice. Like you said, I had some history with head injuries and I had one in L.A. before the playoffs and I had to miss some time because of that and you have to be careful with those types of injuries and even in 2011 — and here we are in 2016 — we start to understand a lot more what type of injury it is and how dangerous it could be. So, at that time, it was hard to step aside and take some time to get back to 100 per cent before I go back on the ice. I was able to come back 100 per cent in the playoffs that year but sometimes in hockey, you have to put those things on the side, thinking about your life and your kids before going back on the ice and risking those kinds of injuries.

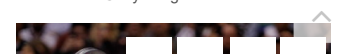
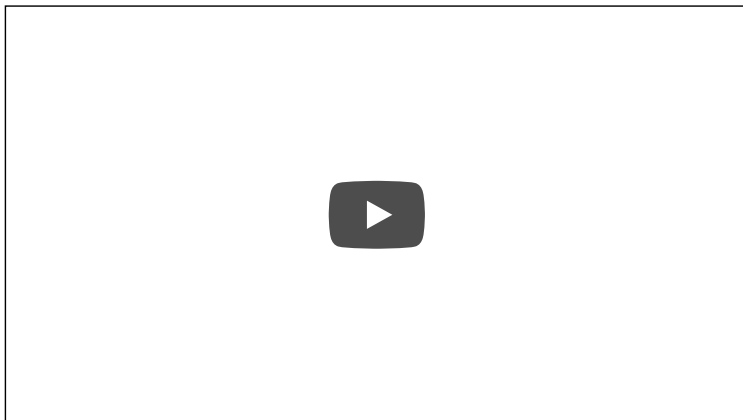
MW: How were you received by the Kings upon joining them? You were a new face in a new locker room but you also brought with you some lineage. An NHL veteran who was a multiple all-star and even an Olympic gold-medalist for Canada in 2002, acquiring a player like Simon Gagne would boost the fortunes of any club. Describe how it was like for you in the Kings locker room and even on the ice.

SG: It's always hard to come to a new place but, like you said, just knowing some of the guys like Justin Williams, (former Flyers coach) **Terry Murray** was the coach there, (Kings assistant coach) John Stevens was the head coach when I was in Philly. So, it was almost like going and playing for the Flyers but in the West, so I felt really comfortable and when you come to a new team, especially one like the Kings, they were hungry to

get back to the playoffs. I mean the trade that brought in Mike Richards and me as a free agent and a couple trades [Dean Lombardi] made after that, those guys were very welcoming. You know, it always helps when you go to a great organization like the Kings and I felt really welcomed right away when I met those guys for the first time.

MW: You returned from injury during the Stanley Cup Final to help the Kings win their — and your — first championship. Take us through what it was like winning that first championship? How did you feel and how, from your vantage point, did it feel for the club's loyal fanbase?

SG: That was one of the best moments I've had in my career. You go through so much as a young kid. Growing up, especially in Quebec where hockey is the number-one sport, dreaming of playing in the NHL, dreaming to win the Stanley Cup. But before that, all of the sacrifices that your parents go through to make sure that you're up at six in the morning and off to bed early. All the sacrifices as a young kid to perform at a young age but, at the same time, you have your buddies that like to party and stuff like that when you're 14- 15 years old and you have to get back to the house for curfews. After that, junior, training, all the injuries that we spoke of before, go through all the surgeries, the good moments and the tough moments you go through to get to the NHL. When you lift the Cup, all that coming into your mind first like a quick movie or a quick picture that comes really fast, all that comes back and that is definitely one of the best feelings that I've been through in hockey.

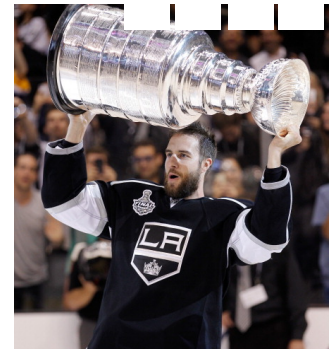


While he may have only been with the club for a little under two seasons, Simon Gagne's contributions to the Los Angeles Kings are no less appreciated than anyone else's and will forever go down in franchise lore.

Gagne would return to the Flyers early in the lockout-shortened 2013 campaign before retiring in 2014-15 after a comeback stint with the **Boston Bruins**.

For hockey fans, Simon Gagne's name is synonymous with success — whether it was in the NHL or even on the international stage. While his tenure in Los Angeles was brief, though, Gagne's time with the silver-and-black was nonetheless memorable. With all due respect to the club's 2014 championship win, nothing is more special for an organization than winning that first Stanley Cup. Furthermore, for the ever-loyal fanbase of the Los Angeles Kings, they will always hold a special place in their hearts for Simon Gagne who helped them and their team realize their long-awaited championship dreams.

**Special thanks to Simon Gagne, Brad Marsh and the Philadelphia Flyers Alumni Association and artist Chris Thomas for their contributions to this article.*



Getty Images Sport
Bruce Bennett