

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM DARRYL SYDOR

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 January 10, 2017



Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo courtesy of the Trading Card Database (1992-93 Topps)

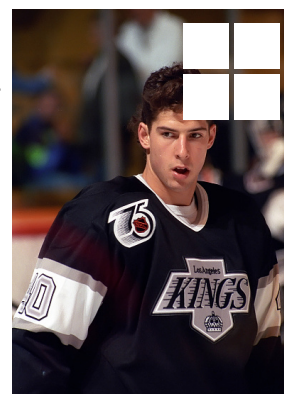
Following their memorable playoff run in 1993, the **Los Angeles Kings** began to trade away their young talent. From **Tomas Sandstrom** to **Alexei Zhitnik**, it had seemed as though the silver-and-black were more focused on winning at the moment rather than patiently building. Whatever the reasons were for this youth fire sale, if you will, many Kings fans were left missing — some even longing for — their favourite players who were shipped out of town. For this writer, no player's departure was more afflictive than that of defenseman **Darryl Sydor**.

Born in Edmonton on May 13, 1972, Sydor would grow up during his hometown's hey-day as the **Oilers** would dominate the NHL in the 1980's while inspiring youngsters to get to the **NHL** themselves in hopes of duplicating said success. This was no different for Darryl Sydor.

In 1988, at the tender age of 16, Sydor would begin his junior hockey career with the **WHL's Kamloops Blazers** where he began his road at becoming one of the best all-around defensemen in hockey. But, it was in 1992, his final year of junior, where Sydor would achieve the most ultimate form of success in junior hockey, helping the Blazers win the **Memorial Cup**. Sydor also helped the Blazers win two **Ed Chynoweth Cups** as the WHL champions.

Prior to that, though, Sydor had already begun his NHL career. In 1990, he was selected seventh overall by the Los Angeles Kings and had played 18 games for them during the 1991-92 season. But, with his junior career in the books, Sydor would go on to play in all 80 games for the Kings in his first full NHL season, recording nine

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goals and 39 in 1992-93. Sydor was just as instrumental that spring as his 11 points in 24 playoff games helped the Kings reach the **Stanley Cup Final** for the first time in franchise history.

Then, on February 17, 1996, the Kings traded Sydor to the Dallas Stars for defenseman **Doug Zmolek** and tough guy **Shane Churla**. Yet, while the Kings struggled for the next few years, the Stars were only getting better as Sydor helped solidify his new team's defensive corps — which included **Sergei Zubov** and the underrated **Richard Matvichuk** — into one of the best in the league. In addition, Sydor would help leading the Stars to their first Stanley Cup crown in 1999 and a Finals appearance the following year.

In a continuation of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'** series, we speak with former Kings defenseman Darryl Sydor who speaks with us about his career with the Kings and what he learned while in Los Angeles.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is Darryl Sydor.

Kirk Muller vs Darryl Sydor



Make Way for the Kings: Following your sophomore season with the Kamloops Blazers where you notched 95 points, you were taken seventh overall by the Los Angeles Kings in 1990. How did you feel



about being drafted by the Kings? Would you have been excited to be drafted by any club or was there something particularly appealing about the Kings?

Darryl Sydor: When you go to the draft, your goal is to make it to the National Hockey League and you just want to get drafted by anybody. So, I wasn't set on any number as it didn't mean I was better than this player or that player. You know what, everything happens for a reason and I was grateful that I was able to get picked by the Kings because they saw something in me.

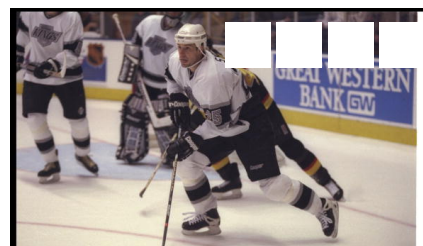
MW: You finished your junior career in ideal fashion by helping the Kamloops Blazers win the Memorial Cup in 1992. Take us through that season, which included your first stint in Los Angeles. How did the win affect your confidence level as you entered the NHL on a full-time basis?

DS: Looking back, that was a very enjoyable year. I was able to go experience a little bit with the Kings that year for 18 games. At Christmastime, I went to the **World Juniors** to play for **Team Canada**. We didn't do well but it was a great experience. Then, the right thing for me was to go back to junior and play. I was only really practicing [with the Kings], not playing a lot — 18 games out of 48 or so — so, for me, it was really important for me to go back [to Kamloops] and play in all different types of roles and you know what, it really worked out. We had a really good team [which also included, among others, Hall-of-Fame defenseman **Scott Niedermayer**] and I was just another piece of it and then obviously winning the championship. There's nothing better than winning a championship, going through it and understand and learning about what it takes to be a winner.

MW: As one of the youngsters on the team, you were instrumental in helping the Kings reach the Stanley Cup Final in 1993. How were the younger guys, like yourself, treated overall?

DS: You know what, 1992-93: it was a year where we did a lot of great things there. It was an enjoyable year, my first full season in the National Hockey League, I believe, and to go to the Stanley Cup Finals, you hope to get there every time, but it wasn't the case. But for young guys and myself — Alex Zhitnik, **Rob Blake** — the veterans really took us in and what better way to learn that from guys like **Wayne Gretzky** and **Jari Kurri**, **Charlie Huddy**, **Kelly Hrudey** — I mean, I can go on and on — **Tim Watters**, **Mark Hardy**, **[Marty] McSorley**. I mean, you don't get thrown into a better situation like that. See, for me, growing up in Edmonton, seeing all these players and all these championships and now you're on the same team and on the same ice, which was remarkable, but they treated me, just like any of the younger guys, like the veteran players. That was very exciting and very comforting for sure.

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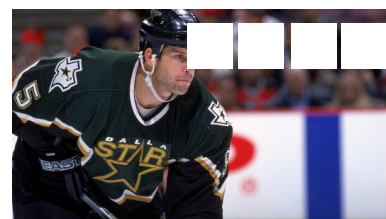
MW: You were traded during the 1995-96 season which was, so to speak, a dark time in Kings history as that team that made their championship run in 1993 was being taken apart. Gretzky was traded, Zhitnik was traded, Tony Granato and Kelly Hrudehy would leave that summer. How did it feel not only being traded but being in that locker room while you were still there?

DS: I mean, after going to the Stanley Cup in 92-93 and then you don't make the playoffs for a few more years, and then— being traded was eye-opening for me as it was the first time I had been traded. Obviously, they wanted to rebuild and go in a different direction. It was very eye-opening for me, though. I think I had about two hours on an airplane, then to see my new team. You know, it's part of the business; it's part of the game. It happened at an early age for myself, just getting married the summer before in '95. It was kind of a whirlwind but, you know, we went on to have some great years in Dallas and played there for a total of nine years — seven-straight. So, it's a tough time one day but you just have to get through it and get used to your new team and stuff like that, but it's an experience. It's something if you grow up fast and understand the league real quick, like the year Gretzky was traded from Edmonton, you find out that you're likely not going to be in the same city for long or for your whole career. Not many are with the exception of guys like **Shane Doan**, but that's the way it is.

MW: Your trade to the Dallas Stars turned out to be one of the best deals they had made as your leadership helped the club win the Stanley Cup in 1999 and even make the Finals again the following year. What lessons did you learn or who did you learn from in Los Angeles to become the leader you were not only in Dallas but for the remainder of your playing career?

DS: Early on in my career, I think the junior team I played with Kamloops, I had [coaches] **Ken Hitchcock** [who later coached Sydor and the Dallas Stars to said Stanley Cup win], **Bob Brown** and **Don Hay** who taught me to be a pro and obviously to get to the National Hockey League. Like I said earlier, when you get thrown into a locker room with Wayne Gretzkys, the Jari Kurris and the Kelly Hrudeys, Tim Watters, Mark Hardy, **Larry Robinson** for a year, you just watch those guys on a daily basis, how they are so professional and what they do to play the game and that's kind of where I learned it: to be a pro. But to watch these guys at the latter part of their careers — Larry Robinson being the first guy on the ice and the last guy off the ice — and when I went to Dallas, I was still younger, but maybe I learned a lot of good things and stayed with it. We had a great group of guys in Dallas. I mean, you go from the Kings and all the guys I mentioned to Dallas — you got the **Craig Ludwigs**, the **Guy Carbonneaus**, **Mike Lalor** — it just goes on and on — **Mike Modano**. Pros. I was able to learn under a couple dozen great hockey players and everybody brings something different.

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Down But Not Out Darryl Sydor '00



While he experienced the ultimate in 1999 winning a Stanley Cup, Darryl Sydor would win another Stanley Cup in 2004 as a member of the **Tampa Bay Lightning**. He would even helped the resurgent **Pittsburgh Penguins** reach the Stanley Cup Final in 2008. Sydor also made stops in **Columbus, St. Louis** and even had a brief return to Dallas before calling it a career in 2010.

At the time of his retirement, Sydor's **1,291 career games** was 16th on the NHL's all-time list among defensemen and his 507 points ranked him 51st all-time among blueliners. Of those near 1,300 games, 288 **were played with** the Kings where Sydor would score 20 goals and 85 assists for 105 points during that time.

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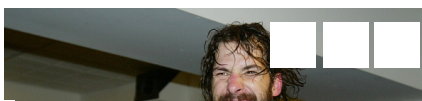


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As talented as a defenseman as he was, though, Darryl Sydor was more revered for his professionalism, his immense work ethic and his sheer toughness [as seen above], making his veteran presence all the more integral in his team's aforementioned championship victories. Sydor even represented Canada on three separate occasions, winning gold at the **World Championships** in 1994.

In late 2006, just months after re-joining the Stars, Sydor and his wife Sharlene **were naturalized** as American citizens at **Armstrong Elementary School** in the Dallas suburb of Highland Park, attended by two of the couple's four children.

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Sydor is currently an assistant coach with the **AHL's Chicago Wolves** and part-owner of the Kamloops Blazers. He also served as an assistant coach





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under **Mike Yeo** with the NHL's **Minnesota Wild** and, prior to that, with the club's then-AHL affiliate, **Houston Aeros**, also under Yeo.

His tenure may not have been long as some would have hoped, but Darryl Sydor nonetheless helped provide the Los Angeles Kings with a number of memorable moments, including an unprecedented — and unexpected — Stanley Cup Final run in 1993. His contributions, though, have made some fans wonder what would have happened had Sydor remained a King or if the team's ownership was in a better situation. Regardless, Darryl Sydor is remembered fondly by many for his time with the Kings and that is especially the case during the club's golden anniversary this season.

Darryl Sydor, here's to you.

**Special thanks goes out to Lindsey Whillhite of the Chicagio Wolves for making this interview possible.*