

ROYAL REFLECTIONS: SPEAKING WITH LA KINGS ALUM STU GRIMSON

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 February 13, 2017



Image credit: Ryan Cowley Original photo credit: Kellie Landis/Allsport

"This is a man gone mad," play-to-play announcer **Jim Hughson** said of him on the evening of **January 16, 1992**. The next morning, I would tune in to **TSN's Sportsdesk** to witness what had happened.

This giant of a man would **dash jersey-less** across the ice of the old **Chicago Stadium** similar to an Olympic speedskater in an attempt to come to the aid of a teammate. This was the first time I ever saw, or even heard the name of, **Stu Grimson**. I was both intimidated and impressed. On the one hand, I wouldn't dare get on his bad side but on the other hand, I would have loved to have him on my team.

However, in the years since that infamous night in Chicago, Stu Grimson, a native of Kamloops, B.C., would establish himself as one of the most respected enforcers in the **National Hockey League** not only for being a hard-nosed warrior on the ice but for being an intelligent and articulate gentleman off the ice as well.

Famously nicknamed '**The Grim Reaper**', Stu Grimson would collect 2,113 penalty minutes over the course of his career while setting a career high of 235 in said category in 2000-01 with the **Los Angeles Kings**. Yet, while he was a King for just one season, Grimson's toughness, size and leadership proved pivotal in a season that would see the club bring a great sense of excitement to its fanbase for the first time in nearly a decade.

In this week's edition of **MakeWay's 'Royal Reflections'**, we feature former Kings enforcer Stu Grimson who speaks with us about his time with the Kings and in southern California overall having also played for the **Mighty Ducks of Anaheim**. Grimson shares with us what brought him to Los Angeles, his experiences under

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then-Kings head coach **Andy Murray** as well as his team's playoff upset of the **Detroit Red Wings** in 2001. In addition, the former enforcer tells us his thoughts on fighting in the game today and even briefs us on what he's up to these days.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is Stu Grimson.



Make Way for the Kings: While you played just one season with the Los Angeles Kings, it was an eventful one. In 72 games, you collected a career-high 235 penalty minutes while even adding three goals and two assists along the way. Needless to say, your 6-foot-6, 230-pound frame struck fear in the hearts of many of your opponents. Was there any doubt what your role was with the Kings upon joining them?

Stu Grimson: That, very simply, is no. By the time I signed with the Kings in 2000, my role, my game, was pretty much established. It was pretty clear that the Kings wanted me for that physical, leadership-type role and that, for me and for [the Kings], although I can't speak for them, it was a really great fit. So, right from the outset, I think it was a really good fit for me but I will say this: I look back over the course of my career and in terms of how competitive our team was, the amount of leadership responsibilities, playing responsibilities, I thought, the organization itself and then just as importantly, if not more importantly, was the quality of guys we had in that locker room, the best I could have experienced over the course of my playing career. I really enjoyed my year as an L.A. King.

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MW: One of those three goals you scored — your first — in a Kings uniform came on December 7, 2000. While hosting the Dallas Stars, you scored in, to say the least, an unusual way as an Ian Laperriere pass out front bounced up and ricocheted off your face and into the net. Physically, how did that goal feel?

SG: The goal was painless. I don't feel much there *laughs*. So, I was happy and awfully surprised when it went in. You don't see a lot of them scored that way *laughs*.

MW: During your time with the Kings, you played under Andy Murray. From your experience, describe how Murray was as a coach.

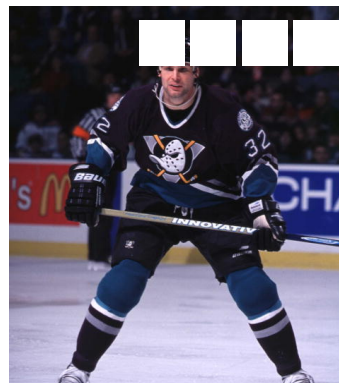
SG: Andy was a really good coach. He was a guy that put a great deal of stock into preparing us to be ready for each game, for each opponent as a coach, and he was a guy who believed— who put a lot of stock into communication as well. So, you always knew where you stood with Andy. You knew what to do, you knew what to expect from an upcoming opponent, you knew just what you were going to see. There was no question as to Andy's work ethic as a coach; he was one of the hardest-working coaches I had over the course of my career, playing under Andy Murray. And again, this was a guy who put a lot of faith and a lot of responsibility on my shoulders, he really relied on me in the role that I played with the Kings and that was a really great fit for me.

MW: Joining the Kings in 2000 meant leaving their crosstown rivals in the Mighty Ducks in Anaheim where you spent a total of four seasons. Describe the similarities and differences between the two clubs. Upon signing with the Kings, was there an ulterior motive to raise the ire of the Ducks and their fans or did you simply enjoy playing in southern California?

SG: I think a lot of similarities in so far as that there was a similar knowledge, a real passion for the game in both markets. The Kings had obviously been around longer when I signed with them, so they had a real loyal following at that point and, you know, they were both really unique markets. They were different in some respects but I enjoyed them both and living in southern California was a great experience for me.

Then, you asked me if my signing was an ulterior motive to get under the skin of Ducks fans *laughs* and that definitely wasn't the case. I just always fondly remember my days while I wore a Ducks jersey. I was an original Mighty Duck and it's always a great experience when you have a chance to start up something new. So, signing with the Kings was never a way of showing up or raising the ire of the Anaheim fans.

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Bruce Bennett
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MW: In your one season with the club, you helped the Kings in a year where they pulled off a shocking first-round upset of the Detroit Red Wings before going the distance with ex-King Rob Blake and the

Colorado Avalanche. As a fan, I was disappointed that you only played five games that postseason as I wanted to see you dish out the punishment, so to speak. Nevertheless, you played an integral role in the Kings success that season. Take us through how you felt that season.

SG: We were a team that kind of scraped, scratched and clawed our way into the playoffs — the Kings of 2000-01. Nobody expected a lot from us but we were one of those teams that when you have to play your best hockey of the year in March and April just to get into the postseason, that leaves you in a pretty- you're a pretty dangerous team when you enter the first round and I think that's what the Detroit Red Wings found out. We played a very disciplined brand of hockey, we played a hard brand of hockey and I thought we really showed well to go on and beat Detroit who were really, at that period in their time, in their heyday, and we had a real strong series against them and we even pushed Colorado to the brink the following series as well.

I was proud as much as anything because I had been a veteran of a number of different playoff runs with some good teams, namely the Chicago Blackhawks back in the early 90's. So, that part of my career was an important contribution to [the Kings] in 2000-01 as we upset Detroit.

MW: After your stint with the Kings, you joined the Nashville Predators, first as a player and then as a TV analyst. What was so appealing about Nashville that made you want to stay? How are you enjoying life as a TV analyst these days?

SG: I love Nashville. I think it is a city with great personality. The people here are wonderful. It's a real affordable place to live, the climate is great and hockey has really become very entrenched in this market. So, for reasons like that, and the fact that I've enjoyed it so much, it's why I chose to make this my home.

And focusing on being a TV analyst, Ryan, I really didn't think I was going to be a broadcaster. I thought I would go on to do something with my law degree, I would maybe work for the player's union long-term, but I must say that now that I've kind of landed in this chair, I really do like what I'm doing. It's really enjoyable for me to use my- to take my experiences as a player and then being able to apply that or share that with our listeners, viewers in the form of a Predators broadcast. So that, for me, has been a lot of fun. It's more exciting than I ever thought it would be.

MW: In recent years, the role of the fighter in the NHL has been greatly diminished. In 2011, there were the untimely deaths of Derek Boogaard, Rick Rypien and Wade Belak. Bob Probert, among others, was discovered to have had CTE, for instance. As a former fighter yourself, how do you feel about said role in the NHL?

SG: I think that's an interesting question and one that I get asked about a lot.

I really do like that fighting remains a part of our game. It has become a very marginalized part of our game but I like that we still have it for a number of reasons:

One, I think it separates us from the other sports, team sports. I've always believed that hockey players play a very physical sport and play it in a fierce and competitive way, and I think that- no better example of that is when a set of fisticuffs breaks out between two guys.

Two, I like that it can be the tactical maneuver and again, for instance, if my team is trailing by a couple of goals in a game and if go out and get into a scrap with someone from the other team, inevitably, my club will get some kind of emotional lift from that and usually there's some kind of offensive surge from that, and that tactical part of the game still exists today.

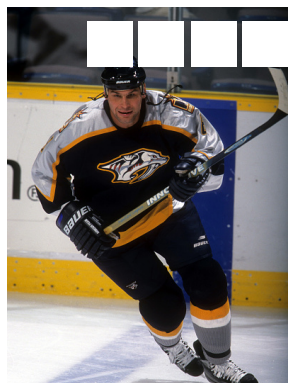
Lastly, and I would make this point above all other reasons, Ryan, which is that I think there is a measure of accountability in keeping fighting in the game, preventing each guy from taking liberties with other skilled players on your team if they recognized that there's somebody on the opposing team that's going to hold them accountable. So, I do like that element of keeping fighting majors in our game and policing them the way we do.

Stu Grimson vs Reid Simpson Dec 28, 2000



He was known as one of the most fearsome fighters to ever play the game. He developed rivalries with the late **Bob Probert** and later on with **Krzysztof Oliwa** while scoring decisive victories over many opponents including **Ryan VandenBussche**, **Shane Churla** and, as seen in the video above, **Reid Simpson** — all of whom had no trouble establishing themselves as bona fide heavyweights. When Grimson left the rink, though, he left his fearsome demeanor behind as well.

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Bruce Bennett
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Off the ice, Grimson was, and is, **as generous** as they come. Known for devoting countless hours to charitable causes, Grimson turns his fists into helping hands as he has worked with such organizations as the **Cancer Society of America** and the **Canadian & American Spinal Research Organizations** as well as helping out at local hospitals. Grimson is also a born-again Christian who, during the mid-1990's, spent his off-seasons preaching sermons at **Chapel Bytle Woods** in Clearwater Bay, Ontario. In addition, Grimson ran summer hockey schools for Christian athletes during his off-season with then-Chicago teammate **Keith Brown**.

After his tenure in Los Angeles came to an end, Stu Grimson would sign with the **Nashville Predators**, but played just 30 games for the club as the 6-foot-6 heavyweight would be forced to retire following a fight with **Georges Laraque** of the **Edmonton Oilers**, which left him suffering from post-concussion syndrome.

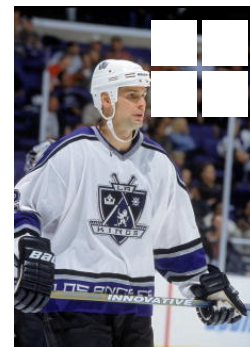
Following his playing career, however, Grimson decided to remain in Nashville where, at **Belmont University**, he would complete a major in economics before moving on to study law at **Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law** at the **University of Memphis**.

After earning his aforementioned law degree in December 2005, Grimson would go to work for the **NHLPA** as **In-House Counsel** (2006-08) before working for the Nashville-based law firm of **Kay, Griffin, Enkema & Colbert PLLC** until 2012. But, Grimson would return to hockey as he is, as previously mentioned, currently a color analyst for the Nashville Predators.

He may have been a King for one season but that one season was a very special, not to mention transitional one for the Los Angeles Kings, and for Grimson as well.

The trading of star defenseman **Rob Blake** saw the Kings turn the page on a new era, so to speak. The short-term future of the team was up in the air as far as their on-ice success went. But thanks to leaders like **Luc Robitaille** and **Ian Laperriere**, the Kings were able to fight on with an unsung supporting cast, and Stu Grimson played a significant role in his team's success that saw the Kings creating playoff memories that would last a lifetime. Yet, while they fell just one game short of their first conference final berth since 1993, the Kings

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nonetheless captivated a fanbase which had been frustrated by the lack of direction that surrounded the team in the mid- to late-90's. Stu Grimson played an integral part in the Kings' turnaround that season.

An intimidating presence on the ice is what made opponents think twice before dropping the gloves with him, but being a selfless gentleman off the ice is what makes so many gravitate towards Stu Grimson. After all, that is the main reason why many Kings fans, to this day, remember the heavyweight's time in Los Angeles fondly and why they feel proud knowing that the big man suited up for their beloved team.

Stu Grimson: Once a King, forever a King.