

Tim Brent

March 10, 1984 -

Tim Brent grew up in Cambridge playing hockey and baseball and was almost as good a ball player as he was a hockey player. But hockey won out.

When starting to skate at the age of two at the old Hespeler Arena, his parents Ian and Rhonda recall him getting frustrated his first time on the ice.

"He likes to do everything fast," said Rhonda. And he couldn't yet go fast those first few times on the ice.

"I had him on the twin blades and he'd just be walking on them and everybody else was skating around him fast," said Ian, "and he didn't like that. I would make him skate for a while and then I would pick him up and go fast."

But the next year he was skating in earnest, and away he went. In those early years he played mini sticks, "from the time he woke up until the time he went to bed. Grandma was the goalie — anybody was the goalie," recalls Ian.

"My mom used to put catalogues on her legs with elastics," says Rhonda, "and they'd go downstairs in the basement and he'd shoot pucks at her."

He was a standout on the ice from his earliest days.

Despite being one of the most talented kids on the ice, there was some adversity in those early years. At age 10 some voice the opinion he was too small to entertain thoughts of playing at a high level.

"I had a run-in with one of the parents," admitted Rhonda, "and they said to me: 'This is ludicrous. Your child should just stop playing. He's not big enough, good enough or fast enough to play.'"

She told the critic that her kids played not to make it to the NHL, but to keep busy and off the street, and to have fun. "He's enjoying himself and doing well at it so he'll play as long as he wants to play."

At bedtime one night Tim told his mom: "Y'know what Mom? I'm gonna make it to the NHL one day."

"If that's your dream, you go for it. Nobody can tell you otherwise."

A couple of years later the same parent called the Brent house because their child had been cut from Triple A and they wanted to know what Tim could do for them.

Tim wasn't the only Hespeler youngster who was small at the beginning.

At one time Ian Brent coached young Steve McKenna who would go on to play for the Jr. B Cambridge Winter Hawks and for various teams in the NHL and overseas. But when McKenna was four, he was so small, said Brent, that they had to tie up his jersey because he kept tripping on it. McKenna grew to be 6' 8", and like Brent was to do, had a solid NHL and professional career.

Brent was a standout with the minor hockey Hespeler Shamrocks and then played with Cambridge in Triple A. Unlike minor baseball, hockey had remained separate when Galt, Preston and Hespeler amalgamated to form Cambridge.

So when Tim and a few others left Hespeler to play AAA for Cambridge, there was some territorial animosity, mostly by a few parents.

Silverheights principal Al Bessey, to his credit, addressed the issue head on by holding a meeting with the parents and players in question, and tried to resolve things.

Needless to say, Tim did well through all challenges while representing the Shamrocks and the Cambridge Hawks, where he played in the 1998 Quebec International Pee-Wee Hockey Tournament.

At age 15, he signed with the Cambridge Winterhawks Jr. B. team of the OHA Midwestern Ontario Hockey League for the 1999–2000 season. Reminiscent of another young local talent who signed with the Winter Hawks as a 14-year-old by the name of Todd Harvey, Brent had a strong year and was taken 2nd overall in the OHL's priority selection draft by the Toronto St. Michael's Majors.

As a Junior he was selected to play in the annual CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game for Team Orr against Don Cherry's team, but due to an injury, was unable to go to Saskatchewan for the game. Tim was disappointed.

But a personal call from Bobby Orr, who told him not to worry about it, helped.

For his part, Don Cherry was always a fan of Tim's, likening him to an old style player.

Brent had an impressive Junior career with St. Mike's until 2003–04. He was drafted 37th overall by the NHL's Anaheim Mighty Ducks in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft, but was re-entered into the draft two years later after not initially signing with Anaheim. In the 2004 NHL Entry Draft, he was selected 75th overall, again by the Ducks. That too was a disappointment, and probably cost him a lot of money, but he never let it deter him from his dream of playing in the NHL.

Anaheim was making a run for the Cup at the time. So, in the 2004–05 season, he started his professional career with the Cincinnati Mighty Ducks but played 18 games for Anaheim in the NHL that season.

The next season, he played on the Portland Pirates, the Ducks' new minor league affiliate. He began his 2006–07 season with Portland, but was recalled to the Stanley Cup-winning Ducks and scored his first NHL goal February 20 against the Vancouver Canucks. He received a Stanley Cup ring that year.

For the next couple of seasons he was on the move after being traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins on June 23, 2007, in exchange for centre Stephen Dixon. The next year he was traded to the Chicago Blackhawks for Danny Richmond.

One of the highlights of his career came on July 6, 2009 when he was signed by the Toronto Maple Leafs. Ironically, that was the same year that another Hespeler native, Kirk Maltby, would wrap up his long career with the Detroit Red Wings, where he won four Stanley Cups.

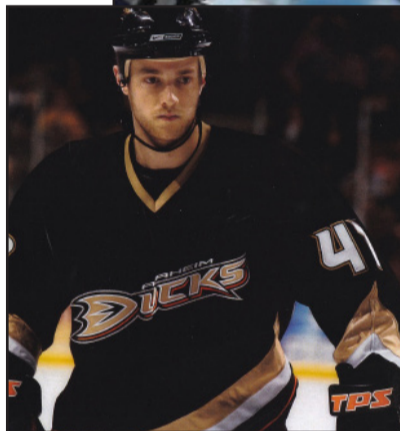
At 13 Tim Brent could remember standing with hundreds of others in the Zehrs parking lot in Hespeler on a sunny July afternoon to catch a glimpse of the Stanley Cup, Maltby's first.

"He really put Hespeler on the map as far as Stanley Cups," said Brent. "It was such a huge thrill for so many people. That's just the type of guy he is. He wants to share it with everybody at home."

During Brent's first preseason game of the 2009–2010 season, he tore his pectoral muscle — requiring surgery that would see him miss four months of action. Following his recovery he returned to play with the Toronto Marlies, scoring 28 points in 33 games. He was called up for the final game of the season to make his debut with the Toronto Maple Leafs against the Montreal Canadiens.

"It's no secret I was the prototypical Leaf fan and I still am, so this is a lot of fun for me," he said. "For me, it's about proving myself every day. It's definitely a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately business, so my focus from the start of training camp to now hasn't changed. I'm going to come in every day and work as hard as I can and continue on a daily basis to prove this is where I belong."

His family was on hand for that game against the Canadiens. "The Leafs were always his team as a kid," said Ian, "and I think that was always his goal."



After a Junior career with St. Mike's Majors, Brent went on to play more than 200 games in the NHL, including two seasons with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

A strong training camp the next season with Toronto saw Brent dress for the Maple Leafs in the season opener on October 7, 2010 versus the Montreal Canadiens. His impact was immediate — he scored the first goal of the game at 6:42 of the first period, and went on to suit up for 79 games with Toronto that season.

Getting off to a strong start in Toronto had an impact both on and off the ice. "I've probably done more interviews in three days than I did in my whole life," he said after a media scrum departed from his dressing room locker stall following Toronto's 5-1 win over Ottawa at the Air Canada Centre.

"It's a testament to Toronto and how much the city and everyone loves hockey. There's no better place to play. It's been great."

He was, in those first few games as a Leaf, a new darling for the Toronto media. Yet it had been six long years as a pro before he got that chance. He was 26, and had, to that point, just over 20 NHL games under his belt.

The next season a spectacular shift earned him a nomination for NHL Play of the Year. In a game on February 3, 2011 against the Carolina Hurricanes, he blocked five shots and cleared the puck in a single penalty kill. This play also earned him a standing ovation at the Air Canada Centre as well as TSN's "No Guts, No Glory" award.

"I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to try and shut down some team's top lines," he told the Cambridge Times, "and that's something that I take pride in: I think also, with guys like Colby Armstrong and Freddy Sjostrom, we take care of our own end, but they're really good players and we can create offensively as well."

The following season he moved to the Carolina Hurricanes, signing a two-year contract on July 1, 2011, followed by a one-year stint in Russia, first with Torpedo Nizhny Novgorod, in 2013, and then, after 18 games, with Metallurg Magnitogorsk of the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL). There he won the Gagarin Cup, named after Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space.

While overseas, he was looking forward to coming home Christmas Eve when he got a call to play for Team Canada in the Spengler Cup in Switzerland. It would be yet another rare opportunity to play for Team Canada. In 2004 he played for Canada at the World Junior U-20 Championships in Finland, with Canada taking silver behind the Zach Parise-led United States. The US edged Canada 4-3 in the gold medal game to win its first-ever title.

He called home to tell his parents about the opportunity to again represent Canada. Russia, which finished fifth, had a young player by the name of Alexander Ovechkin on their squad.

"I'm not coming home for Christmas," Brent told his mom. "I'm at the point where I want to tell them that I'm not doing this. I haven't been home since September."

But Rhonda advised him that his country had called on him, and to stay and play for Canada.

Someone, overhearing Tim's conversation on the phone, interrupted him and said if he was talking to his parents, to have them get their passports ready and come to Switzerland the next day at noon.

Rhonda wanted to go but as chance would have it, her passport was out of date. So Ian went, and Rhonda stayed home with Tonya.

Returning to North America following the 2014–15 season, he signed a one-year, two-way contract with the Philadelphia Flyers on July 1, 2015 and was assigned for the duration of the 2015–16 season, to AHL affiliate, the Lehigh Valley Phantoms. In 52 games with the Phantoms, he had 10 goals and 28 points before announcing his retirement from professional hockey on May 25, 2016.

Over the course of his career — 207 games in the NHL and more than 850 games in the pros — he's had some severe injuries, with shoulders — torn ligaments, torn pec muscle — and elsewhere that kept him off the ice for long periods of time. But he was always sent to top doctors.

"I've learned so much, and met so many different people, it's brought me where I am today."

He married in 2015. They have two children and live in North Carolina, not far from Raleigh. Even before his career ended he began investing in property and is today making a mark in land development.

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