

Dave Andreychuk

Why did I choose Dave Andreychuk? When asked this question, I have no hesitation in responding that great childhood memories most definitely played a huge role in selecting Dave Andreychuk as my sports' hero. You might be curious and wonder: "What are these great memories?"

When I look back on the early 1990's, it is what some Toronto Maple Leaf fans, who are my age, refer to as the 'glory days'. One had the privilege of watching Dave Andreychuk play along side hockey greats, like Doug Gilmour and Wendel Clark. These three players brought out the best, not only in each other, but I would argue the game of hockey. As an aspiring young hockey player during these 'glory days', every time I watched a Toronto Maple Leafs game and saw Dave Andreychuk, I was not just viewing a hockey game, I was inspired to improve. At that young age, I never missed watching 'Hockey Night in Canada' on Saturday because I loved the game of hockey. Dave produced two consecutive fifty plus goal seasons, and unknown to most fans, played with a broken foot in the playoffs during his final season as a Leaf. Dave Andreychuk's combination of class, soft hands in front of the net and hard work, did not just stay on the ice, it came through the television broadcast and into my desire to be the best hockey player I could be.

As I embarked on my own minor hockey career, I was honoured to serve as the Captain and Assistant Captain of championship teams, as well as to receive a number of Most Valuable Player awards. I credit Dave Andreychuk for this because it is players like him who made the game of hockey fun. Role model players like him, energized a young player like myself to play hockey for twelve hours on a frozen pond in forty below weather, causing me to have frostbite on my ears, because I did not want to come off the ice, and I thank Dave for that.

Closely following Dave Andreychuk in his prime as a Toronto Maple Leaf was special, and later during the twilight of his career in Tampa Bay, I was fortunate to live nearby along the Gulf Coast of Mexico in Florida. During my final year in Florida, I traveled to see the Tampa Bay Lightning play the Calgary Flames in the seventh game of the 2004 Stanley Cup final. I went to the game with three hundred dollars in American currency in my pocket. The only two available tickets that I saw on the street that evening were sold to two Calgary fans for a thousand dollars.

Nevertheless, I stood outside along with twenty-two thousand spirited fans and watched the game on the big screen, but I do not regret it, and would do it again. When the Tampa Bay Lightning won the Stanley Cup and Dave Andreychuk, at the age of forty, lifted the Cup high over his head, the noise and emotion on the inside and outside of the arena could not be explained.

My main reason for choosing Dave Andreychuk is because, what he proves and exemplifies does not only apply to sports. Dave's life is a testament to be passionate and never giving up, even if it means traveling a long road, and playing for six different National Hockey League teams along the way. All of the sacrifice, hard work and perseverance are worth it, and very much worth doing over again, when you finally grasp what you have been reaching for throughout your life.

A good leader respects the people he leads. An exceptional leader respects the game with which he has been blessed, and given the ability to play. Most importantly, a mature leader like Dave, commands the respect, and automatically has the respect of his fellow teammates on and off the ice, field or court of competition. Dave Andreychuk's amazing leadership qualities were developed and honed throughout his career.

One of the most creative ways that he exercised his leadership was off the ice during that magical season when the Lightning won the Stanley Cup. To build a higher level of respect within the locker room for the Lightning team and the organization, Dave came up with the unusual, yet effective rule, that anyone who stepped on the Lightning logo, which was on the floor carpet in the middle of the locker room, would be fined a handsome sum of money. If Dave Andreychuk did not come up with this rule, would the Lightning still win the Stanley Cup that year? That is a question I am unable to answer because I am not one hundred percent sure, but it did not hurt the team by any means, since they were victorious. I admire the creativity of Dave Andreychuk. Some people would not have had the courage to bring an idea like that to the table, whether they feared the players' reaction, and the possibility that they might rebel against his leadership, or because this novel idea had not been done before. Originality count, and when Dave Andreychuk speaks up, people raise their heads and listen with focus. When a person has the ability to make people listen, you know you are looking at a leader.

Dave was an inspiration to the Tampa Bay Lightning team. His quiet leadership and desire to win played a key role. Like most championship teams, they had great chemistry. Whether it was Dave's words or maturity, he was able to influence and ensure that the younger players never gave up, and always believed in themselves. Most importantly, Dave instilled in them the team concept and by playing together, they could achieve their goal and win the Stanley Cup.

Another factor that makes Dave Andreychuk, not only an inspiring leader, but also an example of hard work and dedication, is the very fact he signed with Tampa Bay Lightning in 2002. When Dave became a member of the Tampa Bay Lightning, the team was sitting in last place

and definitely not a Stanley Cup contender, but Dave chose to sign with them anyway. The first season they did not make the playoffs, and management knew Dave was getting older so they asked if he would like to be traded. He wisely responded, "My work here is not done."

The following year, Dave led the Tampa Bay Lightning to their first Stanley Cup victory in franchise history, and was instrumental in introducing hockey to the southern United States by doing so. One thing that Dave always did was believe, and he took a chance on Tampa Bay when hardly anyone, including myself, expected them to win the Stanley Cup. At the beginning of the year, he could easily have been traded to a Stanley Cup contender, but he chose to remain. I think that sometimes a team has the hunger to win, but they do not have the direction, and that is what Dave Andreychuk gave the Lightning. There is no question that the Tampa Bay Lightning team had a nucleus of skilled, young talent with Vincent Lecavalier, Marty St. Louis and Brad Richards. I believe that Dave Andreychuk made their hunger even greater, and their direction more focused by the fact he was forty years old and had never raised the Stanley Cup.

"He teaches without trying to teach," Tampa defenseman Nolan Pratt said. "Before Game 6, I look over at him and he's got goose bumps the size of golf balls on his arms. He's been playing for 22 years and he's still like a kid in a candy store. That's the kind of thing he's brought here."

Dave Andreychuk commented: "Getting to the N.H.L. was not just about me getting there, it was about my Dad getting there, and giving him success". I think Dave's teammates felt the same way, that winning the Stanley Cup was not just about themselves getting there, but allowing Dave Andreychuk to get there, and giving him, their captain, the success he so rightly deserved.

Dave Andreychuk's legacy as an ambassador for the game of hockey is far from over. He spends thousands of hours each year attending charity events, and always visits McMaster Children's Hospital where he donates both time, gifts and funds to assist children suffering with illnesses. When it was Dave's turn to have the Stanley Cup for twenty-four hours, he met it at McMaster Children's Hospital. Dave took the beautifully polished trophy up and down the halls, visiting the children who are patients there and leaving the delighted kids with autographed photographs and specially printed t-shirts. He has also established a charitable foundation to assist disadvantaged youth in both Tampa and Hamilton.

Dave presently serves as ambassador for Tampa Bay Lightning in the community, and lives in the Tampa area with his wife, Susan and their three daughters. He has been richly blessed with a loving, supportive family who has been the unsung heroes throughout his illustrious career.

Both the athlete and his family make tremendous sacrifices during the season and throughout the course of one's career. Early in Dave's career, he had all of his front teeth and part of his jaw broken while playing for the Sabres. He was wired and stitched up to resume play the following night. In addition, Dave suffered a broken sternum, two fractured ankles and a dislocated knee.

Reflecting back on Dave's hockey career, I posed to him a number of questions. Acknowledging that "one important factor that can take you far in hockey or any sport is good coaching, I asked Dave "what was it like to play for both Pat Burns in Toronto and John Tortorella in Tampa Bay? Both are very animated, vocal coaches. Is this the type of coaching style you prefer when playing for a team?"

Dave signaled out about the Hall of Fame Coach with the most wins in the history of N.H.L. "As you may guess, I had a number of coaches during my hockey playing days from fathers as a minor to both Pat and John. The coach who was most influential was Scotty Bowman. Each coach motivated us differently. Pat and John's method was to kick rears. As for Scotty, he was soft spoken. All of my coaches left a part of themselves with me."

Following up this facet of hockey, I recognize that "many players have moved behind the bench and took on the coaching role, like your friend, Lindy Ruff in Buffalo. Dave, would you ever consider being a coach?"

Dave admitted that "being around hockey all my life, you miss many things. I have not caught up yet to my family, my kids and friends. Plus ventures outside of hockey, which I am now doing. Coaching is very demanding, almost a twenty-four a day job not only per game, but post game, practice preparation and player analysis. Then actual games--I'm not ready for that yet. But then again, it's possible in the future."

I enjoyed sharing "my earliest memories of hockey involve seeing you play with Doug Gilmour and Wendel Clark. What was it like to play with them? Can you compare playing with Doug and Wendel to playing with Marty St. Louie and Vincent Lecavalier?"

I was not surprised to hear Dave confirm that "Doug, Wendel, Marty and Vince were, and still are great players. With Doug and Wendel, I was younger and my style was different. I stayed around the net. But with Marty and Vince, they're real shooters so I became more defensive minded. I played with many great players from Gilbert Perrault to Marty Brodeur. As well as Hall of Famer, Raymond Bourque who won the Stanley Cup near the end of his career."

“There is a great picture of you hoisting the Stanley Cup and jumping up and down. What was going through your head?”

Dave: "I don't know. I guess you get relieved a little bit, excited for everyone who has been around, and you get excited for the players. I mean you dream about it as a kid, and what you will do when you get handed the cup. It took me a little while to get here I'll say, but you watch the film on it now and it sends shivers down your spine."

Interviewer: "Dave, before winning the Cup, you were a free agent and you could have gone anywhere you wanted but you chose to stay here and finish unfinished business. What did you know that we didn't know?"

Dave: Well you can just see how these guys have turned out, the four guys that are still here, they were just young guys at the time and I felt like there was a good chemistry with the team. We all got along, we all wanted to play for each other and I didn't want to leave that atmosphere. I just felt like something special was going to happen and obviously, it turned out that way but you know, we have some superstar players that are only going to get better."

“After your Tampa Bay Lightning 2004 Stanley Cup win, there was a N.H.L. strike. Dave, have you ever wondered: ‘If there wasn’t a strike, I might have had one more year left in me?’ or are you happy with the way things ended?”

“After the 2004 season and the strike, I played in the 2004-2005 season, until December. The game had changed dramatically and I was released. I said it then, and again now, it would take a Zamboni to pull me off the ice!”



In closing, there are a number of factors that all contributed to Dave Andreychuk's memorable twenty-two year career in the National Hockey League. He was blessed to grow up in a very loving, supportive family, with a strong faith dimension and strong work ethic. Unlike some athletes, who have greater athletic gifts, yet never fully develop them because of distractions away from the game, Dave had a humble appreciation of his attributes, yet a steadfast resolve to be the best hockey player. He was also fortunate to have a relatively healthy career with no career ending injuries. Like old wine that improves with age, Dave's game also improved and evolved throughout his long career. As his physical skills began to wane at the end, Dave Andreychuk's focus and leadership skills soared, and this was the catalyst that elevated the Tampa Bay Lightning to win the Stanley Cup during his final full season in the National Hockey League.

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