

Ric Nattress Study

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Ric Nattress is a Hamilton native that pursued his dreams by becoming a professional hockey player in the NHL. At the beginning of his career he was jumping back and forth from the Farm league to the big league. But soon he turned that into playing fulltime for five NHL franchises. His career spanned over eleven years. He was privileged to win the Calder cup with the Sherbrooke canadiens in 1985. He also was able to raise the holy grail of hockey, the Stanley Cup, with the Calgary flames in 1989. Nattress was also privileged to play for the Toronto Maple Leafs who are the local team and probably a team that he had the opportunity to watch as he was growing up.

Ric Nattress was drafted in the second round of the 1980 NHL draft. He was drafted by the Montreal Canadians team. His professional career began in the minor league playing for the Sherbrooke Canadians. In the beginning of his career Nattress had some off ice issues. In the summer of 1983 he was fined \$150 for possession of three grams of marijuana and one gram of hashish. He was caught by an undercover narcotics officer. According to the Toronto star it wasn't his first time possessing drugs, "Provincial court Judge W.A. MacDonald said evidence showed the player's use of drugs wasn't an isolated incident, but had been occurring since his early

teenage years.” (Thursday, August 11, 1983, F06 sports) These possessions of drugs lead to the NHL suspending Nattress for thirty games.

By 1984 Nattress was still not a full time NHL player. In the regular season that year Nattress had to step in as a defenseman because Chris Chelios went away to play for USA in the Olympics. But by the beginning of the playoffs Chelios was back and the Habs didn’t see any need for Nattress. For the playoffs they only had five defensemen playing against the New York Islanders. For the first two games the Canadians won with five defensemen. For the third game the defensemen seemed worn out and the Islanders won. I think it would have made sense to have Nattress play in the playoffs that year because it was inevitable that the defense would get tired. This was the thought of the Islanders coach as well “It figures that when they’re going with five you ought to be able to wear them down, eh? Eventually, I mean.” (Sunday, April 29, 1984, E01 sports)

Nattress did end up showing Canadiens fans what he was capable of in the 1985 playoffs. In a series versus the Quebec Nordiques Nattress had a huge hit that turned the tide dramatically in game four. The Toronto star reports “When this chippy series is through historians will likely rate this body slam on Michel Goulet as the play that swung this best-of-seven set in Montreal Canadiens’ favor.” (Friday, April 26, 1985, B01 sports) Nattress only played about two minutes that game but he sure made an impact in a big way. Another interesting fact is that he wasn’t even expecting to get any minutes, but he sure did use every minute he had to prove himself. Nattress was playing in the playoffs in the place of injured Chris Chelios.

Before the start of the 1995-1996 season Nattress was traded to the St Louis Blues for cash. This was healthy for Nattress because he was not getting a great amount of opportunity in Montreal. Nattress didn't score a lot of goals in his career but had the ability to set up goals. In game one of the conference finals Nattress set up a big goal to put the "icing on the cake." The Toronto Star reported "A shorthanded goal by the energetic little Meagher on a splendid set-up by defenseman Ric Nattress 24 seconds into the period really was a Flame douser." (Friday, May 9, 1986, C02 sports) This is again more evidence that Nattress really stepped his game up when it mattered. He had many very good games in the playoffs. Not only could he play defense but he had the skills to set-up goals. Nattress was not just another body out there on the ice, he certainly was skilled enough to be out there, and be out there when it mattered.

In the late 80's the Flames were a powerhouse. Nattress was a part of one of the best defensive line ups in the league. A Toronto Star article writes, "The Flame defence rates among the best in the league, especially since Paul Reinhart, a splendid talent who missed almost the entire season with back problems, joins Suter, MacInnis, Bard McCrimmon, Rob Ramage, Ric Nattress, and Dana Murzyn on a big experienced crew" (April 19th, 1988). They were not able to pull off a Stanley Cup championship, but Nattress and the others were eager for the title.

In 1989, that dream came true for the Flames. But that wasn't the only headline involving Nattress. Don Murdoch was caught and suspended for drug abuse (March 13th, 1989). This brought Nattress' name back into the papers and reminded the country of his suspension. However, things passed by; perhaps it

made him and the Flames play even harder. Because that May, they were champions of the NHL. Nattress was a go-getter, a goon in some cases. He couldn't skate well and really just made an effort to get in the way of his opponents. He even had a little tussle with the Great One, Wayne Gretzky (April 21, 1989). In many ways, the game has changed since Nattress' Stanley Cup winning season. For his little scrap with Gretzky didn't even result in a penalty for either member. Gretzky had his jersey pulled over his head by Nattress, there weren't too many punches thrown, but the ref let them be. This would never happen in today's game. Would Nattress be successful in today's NHL? Nattress knew he wasn't the greatest hockey player – but he made up for it in hard work. “Years from now, there might be a time when things aren't going so good... I'll be able to look back and say ‘maybe I wasn't an all-star. And no, maybe I wasn't a great player. But I won a Stanley Cup. I worked my (butt) off and helped accomplish what few others have” (May 27, 1989).

For the next two seasons, Nattress' didn't stand out so much. There was the odd goal or assist here and there, but nothing big. Not until January 3, 1992. Nattress was part of the NHL's biggest trade ever. It was between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Calgary Flames and involved 10 players. The Flames received RW Gary Leeman, G Jeff Reese, D Michel Petit, D Alexander Godynnyuk and LW Craig Berube, in return for C Doug Gilmour, D Jamie Macoun, D Ric Nattress, G Rick Wamsley and LW Kent Manderville (January 3, 1992). This was the tail end of Nattress' career. After this trade, Nattress' didn't play his first game as a Maple Leaf until about 2 weeks later. He was out with a bruised foot and could barely wear a skate. But Nattress

appreciated being in Toronto. “A good part of this trade is that I’m close to my hometown. I grew up on a heavy diet of Maple Leaf” (January 6, 1992).

The next season (1993), Nattress was a free agent and signed with the Philadelphia Flyers. This would be Nattress’ last season in the NHL. “Ric Nattress is not exactly a scoring threat. In fact, if you had to pick a Philadelphia player least likely to score, except for goalies, it would probably be Nattress. The 11-year veteran has two seasons without any goals, and three more with only one” (January 10, 1993). He scored a few goals as a Flyer – but nothing really stood out in his last season until he called it quits and retired from the NHL. He would later go on to be an assistant coach in the AHL for two seasons. But in ’93, he was done playing professional hockey.

Nattress wasn’t much of a threat to the other teams. But he saw himself as an impact player, but in a different kind of way. His job on the ice was to stop the other team from scoring, to give them as little chance possible to do so. He knew his role and he played it. When he ended his career, Nattress had a drug suspension, part of a 10-player trade deal, and a Stanley Cup all under his belt.

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