



## The Edge Newsletter

Committed To Hockey Excellence

February 2024

# Don't accept this': The Penguins' first Black player talks with young Pittsburgh hockey players of color



by Bob Batz Jr. February 12, 2024



Darren Lowe as a Pittsburgh Penguin in 1984, when he played all eight games of his National Hockey League career. But he went on to play 328 games in the pros. (Courtesy of the Hockey Hall of Fame)

Lots of Black history was celebrated, and maybe a little was made Sunday afternoon when possible future National Hockey League players and coaches and managers of color got to hear from the Pittsburgh Penguins' first Black player, Darren Lowe.

Lowe, now 63 and a university professor in his native Toronto, played eight games for the Penguins in the 1983-84 season, but he is more than just the answer to a trivia question. He would go on in 1984 to become the first Black hockey player to represent Canada in the Olympics and, later, among other achievements, the first Black head coach in Canadian university hockey.

Sunday Lowe led an online “culture and identity” discussion for youth hockey players in the Penguins’ Willie O’Ree Academy, a training and enrichment program for Pittsburgh-area Black hockey players ages 10 through 17 that advances the athletes’ skills while developing a strong social support network for them and their families.

The program, sponsored by DICK’S Sporting Goods, is named for the first Black player in the NHL (O’Ree debuted for the Boston Bruins in 1958). It is led by Jaden Lindo, a Brampton, Ontario, native with Jamaican roots who was drafted by the Penguins in 2014. Lindo didn’t achieve his NHL dream as a player, but since 2021 he has worked for the Pens as manager of community hockey programs, with one big goal of increasing diversity in the game.

When Lindo, as discussion moderator, asked Lowe how he overcame any racism or discrimination he faced, Lowe thoughtfully pointed out that his family would talk it out. His father had played hockey, too, on a barrier-breaking all-Black line, nicknamed the Black Flashes, that packed their rink in rural Northern Ontario.

By the time Darren was playing, in the diverse metropolis of Toronto, he usually was not the only person of color or otherness on a team. “There was still some name-calling and of course, some hurtful stuff,” he said. But his parents advised him, “Consider the source. It is not you; it is THEM.”

As a young man, he acknowledged, he sometimes would react by fighting. “I’m not proud of it.”

Later, at the University of Toronto, where he went from being a player to the head coach of the Varsity Blues men’s hockey team, he was able to laugh off subtle racism such as when a person would see him in his suit before a game and ask, “Can you tell me where the coach is?”

Lowe told this group, “I consider myself a hockey player, not a Black hockey player.”



He did not consider himself a top-tier one, either, but he worked hard and made the most of every opportunity, including being invited from UT to Olympic tryouts for Team Canada. Of 100 players who attended camp in Montreal, he was one of two who made the team that traveled to Sarajevo in what was then Yugoslavia.

Canada did not medal at those Winter Olympics, but back home, Lowe became the first Black Canadian to captain a national team, which won a gold medal at the 1984 Spengler Cup. His game-worn Olympic jerseys hang in the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

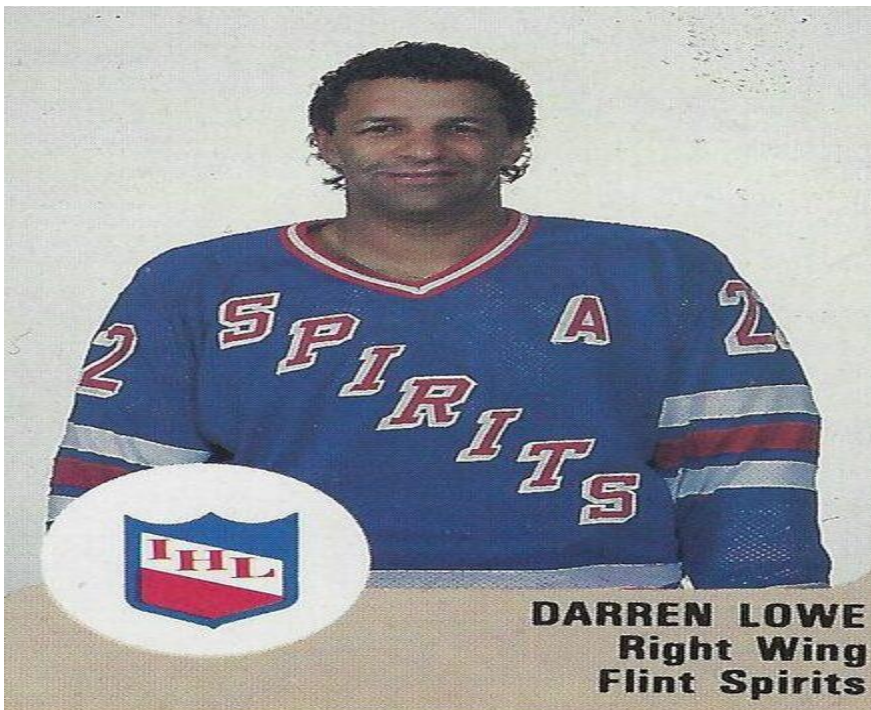
The young Pittsburgh players could see the framed Penguins jersey on one of his office walls.

Lowe recalled his first NHL game — on Feb. 29, 1984, at Pittsburgh’s old “Igloo,” or Civic Arena, vs. the Vancouver Canucks — as “sorta surreal.” Especially when the winger lined up against Dave “Tiger” Williams, a fearsome enforcer young Lowe had watched play with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Williams gave his fellow Canuck a few words of encouragement. Lowe, wearing No. 35, told himself, “It’s still just hockey.”

Asked to namedrop some of his Penguins teammates, he mentioned some good ones in Bob Errey, Mike Bullard, and Marty McSorley. But “It was more of, I hate to say it, a bit of a forgettable group.” The Penguins did not mind being at the bottom of the standings and all the empty seats, because that meant they would have first shot at drafting a young player by the name of Mario Lemieux.

Quipped Lowe, “I was somewhat a part of keeping hockey in Pittsburgh.”





A Darren Lowe card from his playing days with the Flint, Michigan, Spirits in the International Hockey League.

After eight games with the Penguins — and one goal, two assists — Lowe went on to play professionally for a couple of teams in Europe and then in North America, including the San Diego Gulls. His road trip roommate there was another then-rare college-graduate pro player named Mike Sullivan, who now happens to be the Penguins head coach. “He was a great guy,” Lowe said.

Darren Lowe, wearing the captain’s “C” for Team Canada at the Isevestia tournament in Moscow. (Courtesy of the Hockey Hall of Fame)

“We had lots of stuff to talk about and not just hockey.”

Lowe advised the young players to develop their overall athleticism — “I played every sport there was” — and respect the importance of academics. “I grinded at school like I did at hockey.” But his grades, with his training and teaching experience, got him to where he is today.

He also had the help of a mentor for his coaching career, from which he retired in 2017, after 25 years on the UT staff, 22 of them as head coaches.

After Lindo introduced him with his pioneering achievements, Lowe said, “I don’t really think about those firsts, but I guess every once in a while, it’s nice to hear them.”

His favorite hockey memory is not about himself but about his son, now a sophomore playing college hockey (and studying engineering) in the States, winning a youth national championship. He also is the proud dad of a daughter who is a serious college student who plays soccer.

To continue to improve hockey, and other sports, for all, Lowe said the key is to keep proactively educating players and other people, and to never accept racist comments or behavior

— something that must be supported in homes and schools as well as hockey rinks. “It’s a big job for us to get this out of hockey.”

Physically fighting is not the answer, he reiterated. But he urged the young people to be willing to fight for what they want. While he said there is not anything he would change about his life, he wonders if he was too quick to accept playing in the minor leagues. “Don’t accept this,” he said. “Fight your way into getting on an NHL team!”

Lindo liked the sound of that, telling everyone that whatever their dreams are, “We are capable of so much more than we believe that we are.



Darren Lowe, right, with Team Canada and the Spengler Cup in 1984. (Courtesy of the Hockey Hall of Fame)



## Mid Am Girls Council hard at work

Mid Am Girls Council has been quite busy this month. There were events in Ft Wayne as well as the Cleveland area. In Ft Wayne, we had about 20 girls from across the Indiana area-some of the Indy Elite were present to assist and the big assist came from the Indiana Tech Women's team. The girls were also able to be recognized in the stands during the Komets game that evening.

The other recent event was held in Garfield Heights Cleveland area. With the assistance of various groups including the CSHL and the Barons, there were 41 girls that attended. There was stations on the ice with various skills sessions happening. These girls will get to attend a Monster's game in March.



Photos Provided by the events held in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Cleveland, Ohio Area



## Community Service

Each year Steel City Selects teams choose a community service project that they want to focus on for the season.

This year our 19U team has chosen the organization Morgan's Message. This organization was created to honor the legacy of Morgan Rodgers, a former Duke University Lacrosse student-athlete who died tragically in July 2019 after battling mental health struggles. This organization was created by her family and former teammates with the mission to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health, normalize the conversations about mental health and to ensure that mental health is treated equally to physical health for all student-athletes.

This issue has touched many of our players personally which is why they chose to have this be their service project for the 2023-24 season.

During the recent Steel City Selects Invitational Tournament the team wore Morgan's Message stickers on their helmets as well as green tape on their sticks to bring awareness to suicide prevention. They also designed and purchased special t-shirts with the Morgan's Message logo to wear at warm-ups.

The players passed out Morgan's Message bracelets and helmet stickers to the nearly 600 female hockey players that attended the tournament. A moment of silence for all those lost to mental illness was also held prior to the Steel City Selects 19U vs. Grand Rapids Griffins 19U game on Feb 17 at Baierl Ice Complex. The players also set up an information table that provided mental health resources or individuals.

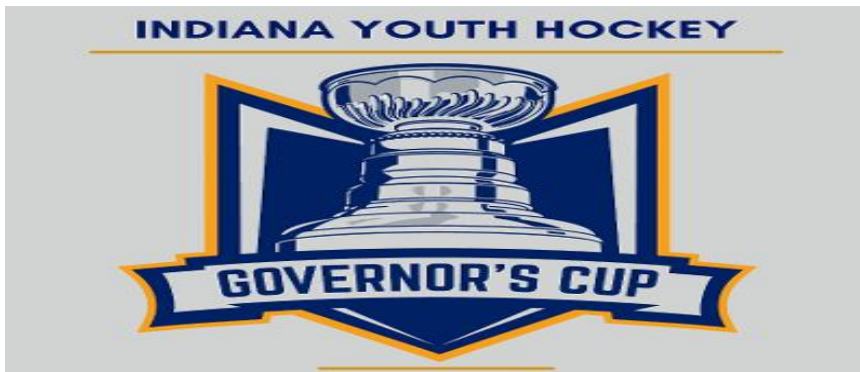
For more information on this amazing organization please visit [morgansmessage.org](https://morgansmessage.org)











Fort Wayne Force Cardinal 8U Champions



Fort Wayne Force 8U Brickyard Champions



Indy Fuel Red 8U Hoosier Champions





Fort Wayne Force 10U Cardinal Champions



Indy Jr Fuel Red 10U Brickyard Champions



Indy Fuel Gold Capital Champions



Columbus Flames 10 Hoosier Champions

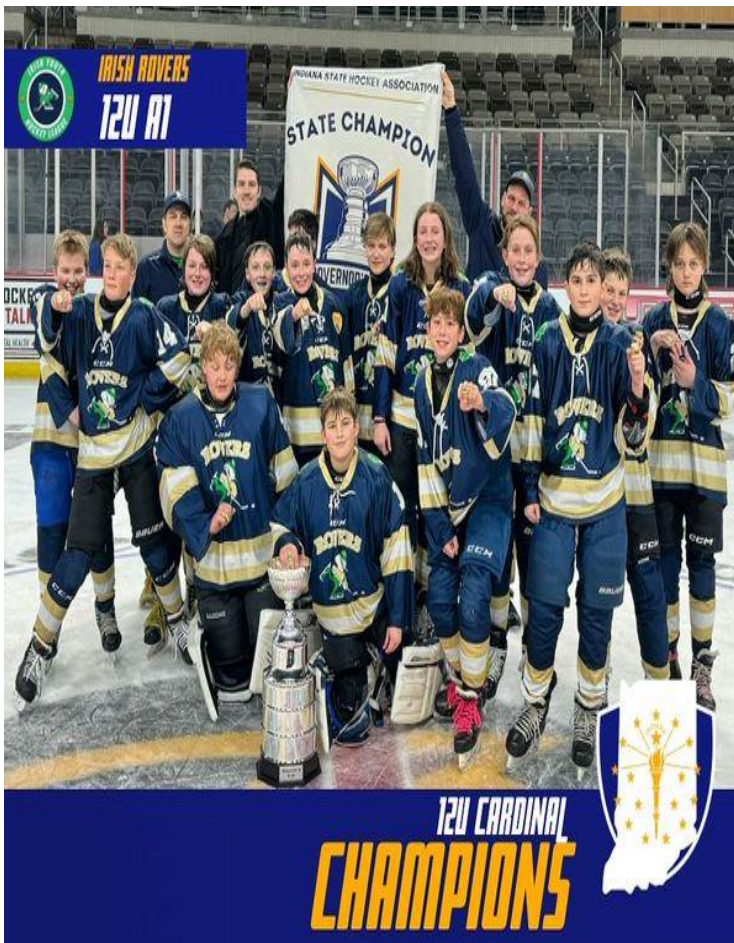




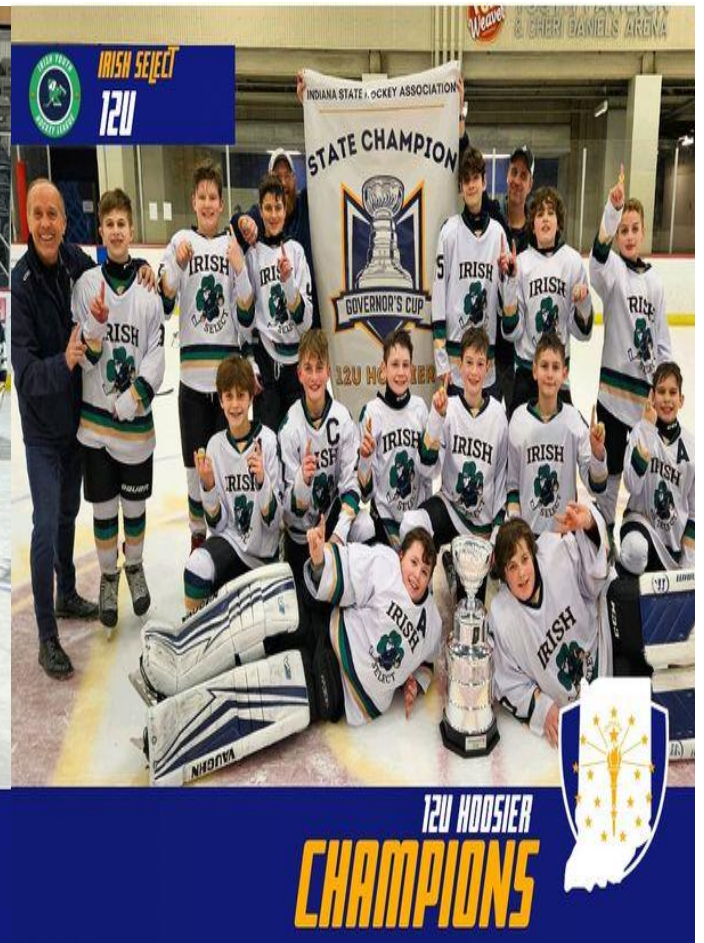
South Bend Irish Rovers 12U Cardinal Champions



Midwest Blackbirds 12U Brickyard Champions



South Bend Irish Rovers 12U Cardnial Champions



South Bend Irish Rovers 12U Hossier Champions





Fort Wayne Force 09 Blue 14U Cardinal Champions



Hammond Mohawks 14U Brickyard Champions

South Bend Isish Rovers 14U Hoosier Champions





### Indiana Governors Cup Girls Festival HighLights

