

Mike Kitchen ?honoured? over induction to Sports Hall of Fame



By Jake Courtepatte

Two-time Stanley Cup winner, Schomberg native, and ex-Aurora Tiger.

Mike Kitchen, the assistant coach of the Chicago Blackhawks, is one of three new members of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inducted into the ?Coach? category for his tremendous accomplishments in the world of sports.

Having lived in Aurora for decades, and helping to coach one of the NHL's only dynasties since, perhaps, the Detroit Red Wings of the late ?90s, he has certainly earned the honour.

?It's quite an honour, because it says I'm part of the Aurora community,? said Kitchen. ?I'm in awe. It's very special. It's perfect for my mother? she lives on John West Way, so she can just walk down to Town Hall and check it out.?

?We lived in Aurora for 32 years. The town is terrific, everything we've ever been involved in has been amazing. It's a special spot for us, and always will be.?

Growing up in Schomberg, his minor hockey days were spent with the Schomberg Red Wings club. It was there that he was scouted for the Aurora Tigers junior club, then in the Metro Junior B league.

Kitchen recounts joining the Tigers as a defenceman, generally for any players between the ages of 16 and 21, at the age of 15 along with future third-overall NHL draft pick Rick Hampton.

?We had a veteran team my first year, some of the guys are actually still in the area. But when you're that young, you're in awe. You're playing against guys that are 20 years old. It's quite an age difference, physically, at that time of your life.?

He spent two years with the Tigers, putting up 19 points in his second year once the team moved to Junior A.

Kitchen would then move on to the Toronto Marlboros of the OHA, before going pro with the Colorado Rockies in 1976, which became the New Jersey Devils while he was still with the team in 1982.

His coaching stint began four years after his retirement, joining the Newmarket Saints, a minor league American Hockey League team in the mid-80s, in 1988.

"When I ended up retiring, we came back to the area," said Kitchen. "We were expecting our second daughter, and we came back to see if this is where we wanted to settle."

The connection between growing up in nearby Schomberg and his junior hockey days made it a simple choice for the Kitchen family to settle in Aurora.

"We figured it was a nice, small town," said Kitchen. "A good place for a family to grow up in."

The Kitchens' two daughters got involved in the Aurora Skating Club, an experience Kitchen says they really enjoyed.

After one year with the Saints, he was subsequently hired by the Toronto Maple Leafs for the same role, spending eight years with the club before moving on to the St. Louis Blues.

He was the head coach of the Blues for parts of three seasons, and has spent the past six as a member of the Blackhawks, playing a role in two of the team's three championships in the past six seasons.

The induction into the Hall makes for a fitting end to the Kitchens' time in Aurora, having just sold their house, and opting to spend their time between Chicago and the family cottage.

"There would often be no one in the house; my daughters have bought their own homes—we loved Aurora, but it just didn't make sense to keep an empty house."

Kitchen has been inducted along with Mike Murphy, ex-coach of the L.A. Kings, and Sheldon Galbraith, a legendary figure skating coach, into the Coaches category of the Hall. Downhill ski Olympian Karen Stemmler was also inducted, into the Athlete category.

Over the next few weeks, The Auroran will be highlighting each inductee.

Held annually at St. Andrew's College, the ASHoF Induction dinner is one of the most spectacular nights of the year in the Aurora sports community. This year's dinner will be held on November 2, and more information can be found at www.aurorashof.ca.