

14-year NHL veteran and 25-year League Exec Kris King to be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame



After being drafted in 1984 by the Washington Capitals and bouncing between his OHL team in Peterborough and two AHL teams, Kris King's 14-year NHL career was a North American odyssey.

It started with two seasons as a Detroit Red Wing from 1987-1989 followed by three and a half memorable seasons with the New York Rangers.

The sturdy left winger was traded by the Rangers in December 1992 when he and Tie Domi were sent to the Winnipeg Jets for Eddie Olczyk.

King would serve as Captain of the Jets just before the franchise moved from Manitoba to the desert as the Coyotes were established in Phoenix in 1995. During his two-season sojourn in Arizona, King earned the King Clancy Memorial Trophy in 1996 for exemplifying leadership qualities on and off the ice and for making significant humanitarian contributions to his community.

The Award in many ways foreshadowed King's future leadership role with the NHL as the Vice President of Operations.

After helping with the transplant of the Winnipeg franchise in Phoenix, King was signed for three seasons in Toronto with the Maple Leafs from 1997-2000 which allowed him to settle his family in Aurora where he and Paula raised their family for fourteen years. The much-traveled veteran completed his NHL playing career in Chicago with the Blackhawks in 2001.

Upon retirement prior to the 2001-2002 season, King had played 849 games, tallied 66 goals and 85 assists, and amassed 2,030 penalty minutes along the way as a respected team leader on and off the ice for six franchises, including four Original Six teams.

King stayed in hockey after retiring as a player. He's served in an executive capacity at the NHL's headquarters in Toronto for the last twenty-five years. The long-time Aurora resident currently residing where his roots are in Muskoka is the NHL's Senior Vice-President of Operations.

I caught up with King during his commute from cottage country to downtown Toronto ? after texting him one of my favorite Kris King Upper Deck hockey cards as an icebreaker. His action card photograph was taken during his last season in New York in 1992-93 and he was amused by the gesture.

After getting situated for our interview, the 59-year-old League exec texted me back with a concise summation of the card, the Rangers' rise to prominence, the upside to the trade to Winnipeg, and a smidge of remorse about missing the Rangers' historic 1994 Cup win: ?Funny. Good team. Tough trade that worked out. Minus The Cup, of course.?

We started our conversation there?smack dab in the middle of his NHL career as he witnessed the rise of the Rangers to the status of Stanley Cup contender in 1992:

The Auroran: Let's talk about the Big Trade. You and Tie Domi get traded by the Rangers to the Jets for Eddie O on December 28, 1992. How significant was this trade for your career?

Kris King: Anytime you get dealt, it's tough, but I was quite excited. Roger Neilson was the Coach in Winnipeg. I worked at Roger's hockey schools in the summer. We had two really good seasons in New York, but we were struggling that year. Tie and I found it strange that we were both sitting out versus the Bruins. Usually at least one of us would be on the ice. Something didn't feel right when both of us were in the press box. As it turned out, we were traded that night, but it was great for us to go to the Jets?we had some great young players but they were being taken advantage of. Tie and I went to Winnipeg to give the Jets more toughness and provide the talented young players with more room to operate. As a family move and a hockey move, it was like going home to a smaller hockey town. Paula and I loved it in Winnipeg?we still have friends from our time there. I was also put into a leadership role in Winnipeg and it was a really positive experience. I became the last Captain of the original Jets. Keith Tkachuk was the Captain, but [Winnipeg General Manager] John Paddock asked me to be the Captain so Keith could focus on his game when we were in our difficult last season in Winnipeg. I was told to 'get us through this year' and I was the guy chosen to lead the team during what was a tough time for the fans with the team on the move. It was an honor. It was a lame duck season in Winnipeg, but as a group, we were determined to play as hard as we could for the fans despite the move to Phoenix. There was an excitement, too, about going to Arizona, but we loved our stay in Winnipeg. It felt like home and it was a great place for our family.

The Auroran: Speaking of home and family, what was your reaction when you received your call from the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame?

Kris King: I can say honestly that I was proud and surprised, especially since Paula and I are no longer living in the community. I know how important the induction into the Hall was for Murph (2016 ASHOF Inductee Mike Murphy) and I feel the same way. We lived fourteen years in Aurora. We had our first hockey home in Aurora after living and renting in Detroit, New York, Winnipeg, Phoenix. When I signed with Toronto, we bought our home, raised our kids, and felt a connection to their school communities, too.

The Auroran: Many of those connections will be evident at Thursday's ceremony. You're about to be enshrined in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame with a number of former NHLers?Greg Hotham (2014), Steve Vickers (2021), Mike Palmateer (2017), Mike Kitchen (2016), Jim Thomson (2023), Dave and Ryan Gardner (2019), Bob Wall (2017), Mike Murphy (2016)?..How does it make you feel to join these fellow inductees?

Kris King: So many of the guys I played with when I was with the Leafs settled in Aurora and in the surrounding towns like Ballantrae and King City. Like so many NHLers who lived in Aurora, our kids had friends at school and in the neighbourhood. When we finally settled in one place, it was kind of neat. All the good memories we had in Aurora ? to be recognized by the Town's Hall of Fame after enjoying so much of my time in Aurora is something very special to me. The Hall of Fame staff in Aurora does such an amazing job. [Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed Khan's] emails show his attention to details ? it's on a different level compared to many other sports Hall of Fames. I'm looking forward to the interactions with my fellow inductees.

The Auroran: Let's focus on your current role with the NHL. What's the most enjoyable aspect of your job as Senior Vice President of Operations at the league's headquarters in Toronto?

Kris King: I was retired for about two months and I had an opportunity to start work with the NHL with two of my former coaches?Colin Campbell and Mike Murphy. We were all connected to Roger Neilson so it was a great working environment. Working as a VP has allowed me to stay in the game that I've loved since I was a kid. I grew up around the rinks in Bracebridge. To be so lucky to get a job in the league, to be there for 25 years, and to help make sure the game is played the right way is special to me.

The Auroran: Has it helped you as an NHL executive to have played in so many of the best hockey markets in North America and what were your favourite places to live?

Kris King: We had so many different experiences. We were young parents in Detroit. Living in Rye, New York was a big change for us. Our favourite place to play and live was in Winnipeg. Not too many guys say that about Winnipeg, but we loved it. It was smaller and it reminded me of home in Muskoka. It was a great place to raise the kids. We made so many friends?the parents of our kids' friends. All the situations we experienced helped us learn about ourselves.

The Auroran: After re-settling your family four times and playing hockey in four cities, what was the highlight of signing in Toronto and being a Toronto Maple Leaf for three seasons?

Kris King: It was so exciting to play for the team that I grew up cheering for, but also to live in Aurora so we could buy our first house. We were so happy with the kids' schooling, too. There was an Aurora connection on the team. Kitch [Mike Kitchen], Cujo [Curtis Joseph], and I would drive together with Murph [Mike Murphy]. We would make our way down the highway to go to work. I remember finding out as a non-restricted free agent about the possibility of playing in Toronto after coming off my second season in Arizona. My agent contacted me when I was at a wedding in Vancouver and he told me 'we had some interest in Toronto.' He told me later that day that he 'had just heard from Toronto and you can go home.' I called my dad and he was so thrilled. Playing at Maple Leaf Gardens was so great. My first game as a Leaf was the highlight. My dad was standing there along the boards behind the glass during warmups and he gave me the thumbs up and I gave him a wink. It was a special moment to be home and share it with my dad.

Kris King, Erlinda Biondic, Robert Reid, and Heather Morning will be enshrined in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in a community ceremony on Thursday, November 6. The 12th Annual ASHoF Induction and Celebration Evening will commence at 5.30 p.m. at the Royal Venetian Mansion.

By Jim StewartLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter