

Steve Vickers returns triumphantly to New York for the Rangers? 100th Anniversary Celebrations

New York Rangers star Steve Vickers appears to be as calm in 2025 as we chat in Aurora as he was in 1974 in The Big Apple when he was featured on the cover of Hockey Digest.

In an article written by New York Post reporter Hugh Delano entitled "The Unflappable Steve Vickers," the Rangers beat reporter quoted Walt Tkaczuk's impression about his second-year linemate: "All this is new to him and yet he's always cool and never acts excited about anything. He's got ice water in his veins. He takes everything in stride, the good and the bad. I wish I could have been like him when I came into the league. He should last a long time with his attitude. He's got the perfect temperament for a hockey player."

Flash forward to 2025 and Vickers remembers the magazine article I've brought with me to Wicked Eats for him to peruse.

"Someone gave me a copy of the magazine to keep a few years ago." He added jokingly, "I wished I'd asked for three."

The value of Vickers's memorabilia grows as does his staying power with the New York Rangers hockey club, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this Fall.

The Broadway Blueshirts entered the NHL, along with the Chicago Blackhawks and Detroit Red Wings, in 1926. All three "Original Six" franchises have been feting their former stars for their feats and Vickers was happy to be part of the celebrations at Madison Square Garden on November 8 on "Milestones Night."

"It was great to be back for the first one and to see guys like Adam Graves and Mike Richter. The Rangers are a first-class organization and I enjoyed my ten years playing for them. I'm going back for a second celebration in two weeks with my son."

Vickers had many milestones in his ten-year hockey career spent entirely with New York from 1971 to 1982, including a seven-point night for the Rangers and winning one of the league's most famous trophies.

Despite missing one-fifth of the season due to a knee injury, Vickers notched 31 goals and 23 assists in 61 games to earn the Calder Memorial Trophy in 1973.

Another distinctive milestone moment that the Rangers celebrated on November 8 was Vickers scoring back-to-back hat tricks as the Rookie-of-the-Year.

"I didn't think I'd score one hat trick, let alone two, but Walter and Billy got me the puck. They did all the work and made me life pretty easy. Two games later, I got hurt in a knee-on-knee collision with Darryl Edestrand in a game against Pittsburgh. I got great medical care and I was young enough to bounce back and missed less than two months."

In our booth at the north Aurora eatery, the rugged left winger reflected on the fond memories connected to his rookie year and he reveled at being a career-long Ranger.

He was especially appreciative about the chance he got in his first year in New York to play on a line with Tzachuk and Bill Fairbairn.

"I loved those guys. They were unbelievable players. They loved to play and they loved to win. Walt's still good?he's got a golf course in St. Mary's. Billy's such a nice guy, too. He's out in Brandon, MB."

The terrific trio was eventually dubbed "The Bulldog Line" for their tenacity.

?We loved scoring all the goals?in my rookie year with them, I got thirty and so did Billy, and Walt got twenty-seven-- but we enjoyed shutting down the other team's top line even more.?

When asked which player they most liked shutting down, the answer was immediate: ?Phil Esposito.?

?We knocked the Bruins out of the 1973 playoffs. Ron Harris hit Esposito hard early in the series and he was never the same. As a line, we were able to limit Phil's scoring and we won the series.?

What Vickers fails to mention?due to his modesty as a classic hockey player ? is that he scored a hat trick in Game 5 of that series to help sink the mighty Bruins.

The New York star's reticence to discuss his accomplishments served to reinforce his calm demeanor, but that didn't prevent Vickers from getting fired up when talking about the fights he engaged in during ?The Rock-?Em, Sock-?Em 70s?, especially against the fiendish Philadelphia Flyers.

?I didn't hate many players, but I hated Ed Van Impe. Philadelphia had lots of fighters?Schultz, Saleski, Kelly?but Van Impe would cross-check me throughout the game when I was by the net and eventually I got mad enough to fight him. We had a disagreement that night that we resolved.?

It became evident in our chat that Vickers was not only a talented scorer in his heyday in New York?he peaked at 41 goals in 1974-75 and amassed 246 goals and 340 assists in 698 games?but he could also handle himself when he dropped the flippers. Included in the six dustups of his rookie season was a notorious TKO of Don Marcotte with one punch. Vickers dismissed the severity of the knockout punch: ?He got up-- almost immediately.?

These kinds of gladiatorial moments at Madison Square Garden?coupled with his skills as a natural goal scorer?endeared Vickers to Rangers fans and the 74-year-old reflected on how he embraced living in New York in the 1970s.

?We lived on Long Island as did most of the players for the first three years except Rod Gilbert who lived in Manhattan and enjoyed the night life. [Ranger Coach Emile] The Cat [Francis] told us that only Gilbert would be able to live in the city. Eventually, we all moved into Manhattan to enjoy everything the city had to offer. There was always so much to see and do. We even went to Studio 54 a few times. Ron Duguay got all the girls.?

In addition to embracing the life that New York offered, Vickers also discussed having to embrace change when his playmaking centre Jean Ratelle was traded to the Boston Bruins along with Brad Park for Phil Esposito and Carol Vadnais.

?It was unbelievable. Brad was our best player and Jean was such a talented playmaker that put pucks right on my stick. I was playing on a line with Ratelle and Rod Gilbert at the time of the trade. Phil eventually settled in as a Ranger and Vadnais hard negotiated about salary before he would agree to be traded from the Bruins.?

Vickers offered few regrets about his ten-year career in the NHL, but he did note his frustrations with one Chicago Blackhawks goalie he faced through the 70s.

?Tony Esposito. I couldn't score on him. Only got one goal on him. Scored hundreds of goals, but only got one past Tony.?

Despite his inability to get many by Tony O, he beat a range of goalies on a regular basis. Vickers closed his colorful career in New York in 1982. Three years later, he moved to Aurora with his wife Joanne to raise their three children.

?We loved living in Aurora. I worked for Yellow Pages for eighteen years?commuting to 401 and Markham Road. It was a lot of fun. The Town had golf courses and it had a hockey team. My son, Tim, played two seasons with the Junior Tigers. It was different

back then when we moved here ? the population was only 14,000.?

Vickers's connection to the Town led to his induction in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in 2021.

?It was exciting to be inducted. I knew a couple of the players?Mike Murphy, Mike Palmateer?who had been inducted. My daughter, Jillian, flew in from California and my son, Brett, were there at the ceremony, too.?

Vickers's connection to Aurora is maintained through his role as a starter at Westview Golf Course: ?I enjoy doing that once a week at Westview. Mike's a wonderful guy to work with.?

As we transitioned from discussing his best golf moment??Shooting a 74 at Glenway??to peering over the 70s memorabilia I brought to structure our chat, Vickers graciously autographed his rookie card from my collection: ?I'm wearing Bob Nevin's jersey for my first hockey card, but I had my gloves.?

As he chose the black sharpie over the Rangers blue sharper for inscribing the vintage 1973 card, he acknowledged that ?I signed over 1,100 items the other day.?

The current demand for memorabilia containing Vickers' likeness shows that the reserved retired Rangers star has staying power not only in the Big Apple where he flourished throughout the 70s, but also here in York Region. Now in his 70s, Vickers remains popular with fans in town. He'll be attending the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Christmas party on Friday and will be ready to meet golfers at Westview Golf Club when the snow gives way to warmer weather next Spring.

By Jim Stewart