

## The Great Wayne Gretzky

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By Mike Ox

EDMONTON (CUP) -

Some great things only come around once in a while.

Others happen all the time. I guess that's why for 10 years, I took one of the greatest

hockey players of our time for granted. I grew up watching him, never fully realizing the history that this man would create. And, oh how, I loved the way he played.

Everyone wanted to be number 99 on the ice or on the street. He was a hero, an icon, and a God.

The things of value to me then were not the price tag on my extravagant hockey card collection, but the fact that I surrounded myself with my heroes all the time. From using Jari Kurri in my bicycle spokes for the unmatched motorcycle sound to carrying a tattered Mark Messier card around with me where ever I went, hockey was in my blood. However, there was one player whom I guarded, one player that I would do anything for.

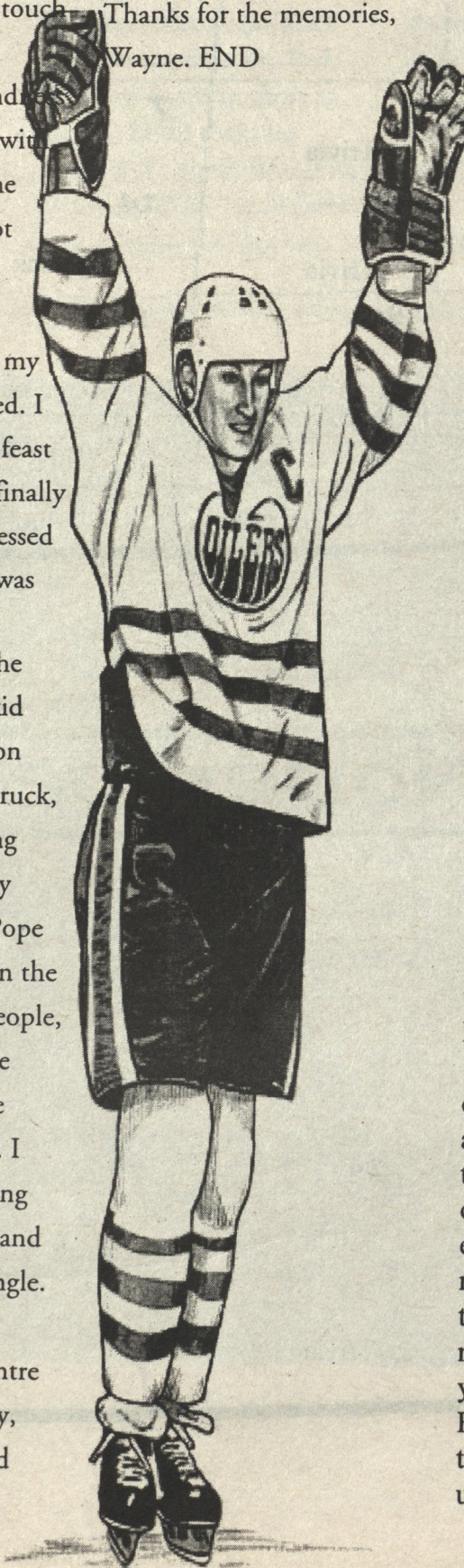
Wrapped in a protective plastic shell, hidden away in my room, only the worthy could feast their eyes upon my Wayne Gretzky rookie card. And only I could touch it. Then, through the passage of time, my fond memories faded. I had lost touch with my heroes. I had lost the memories, but I had not forgotten.

On October 1st, 1999, my memories were rekindled. I had the opportunity to feast my eyes on him, and I finally realized that I had witnessed something great. Here was my hero addressing his biggest fans in the city he loved, and I felt like a kid again. Driving around on that shiny new Dodge truck, I remembered something else: Long ago, when my family went to see the Pope and he was driving down the road waving at all the people, for one instant, the Pope looked me right in the eyes, waved, and smiled. I remember the hairs raising on the back of my neck and my skin beginning to tingle.

And in the Skyreach Centre on that cold October day, where I sat on the second

level, 31 rows up and in seat 13, Gretzky looked right up at me, and smiled. You know when the hairs stick up on the back of your neck? That's Gretzky.

Thanks for the memories, Wayne. END



## Good Riddance; The Gretzky I know.

by kent bruyneel

When I was a boy my family had season tickets to the Vancouver Canucks hockey games. I became, and still am, a rabid fan of the sad sack team. It was my pleasure to see many of the greatest players hockey has ever seen, in their prime, on, of course, opposing teams. Lemieux, Bossy, Neely, Messier, and of course, the devil himself, Wayne Gretzky. Mr. Canadian Icon. Mr. Wonderful. Fuck that. For some eight years I watched him and his coke sniffing pals dismantle the Canucks four times a year. Upon arriving at the games my father would say to me, "how bad ya think the Canucks will get hammered tonight?"

Oh but there was one time. The Canucks, after having not beaten the Oilers in five years, or something, led 5-1 entering the third period. My father, ever the pessimist looked at me and said, "don't get your hopes up boy." Five minutes in to the third period Gretzky set up Glen Anderson. 5-2.

Three minutes later it was Kurri. Then Kurri again. Then Gretzky himself. And the game was tied. A tie is good, I thought. A tie means we are equal, just as good as the Oilers and their band of future hall of famers. Gretzky counts with two minutes left and the game is over. The air, proverbially, shot from my sail I ride home with my father listening to him cackle. The post game radio show talks about moral victories. About how close the Canucks were this time. If not for Gretzky they most certainly would have won. Fucking Gretzky.

Gretzky scored his first NHL goal and his 802nd goal against Vancouver and seemed to always be playing the Canucks when a significant record was broken. It is an indisputable fact that he scored more often against the Canucks than any other NHL team. And no, the lovefest around him in the past few years has not changed my opinion.

Gretzky will always be an Oiler, with his nancy boy shirt tucked into his nancy boy pants, and his majestic circle just inside the blueline that made me want to tear off his arms and beat him with them. And I will always hate him. Hate, you understand, the way I hate tribute albums, not hate in the way I hate Aerosmith, or Grant Fuhr. He is, unquestionably, the game's greatest player; which makes me even more glad he is gone. Go Canucks. END