

Paul Bossy. COFFEY, Paul 3.
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Timing perfect for
Coffey recognition
MN April 1, 2016

One play, one moment can define an athlete's career.

Flashback: 1972 Summit Series Canada vs. the Soviet Union, the final seconds of Game 8.

Paul Henderson, a sixth-line left winger who wasn't supposed to make the Canadian team let along history, scoring the winning goal with a few ticks left on the clock, and that goal left an indelibly imprint on the game.



Rick Drennan

One play, one moment.

Flashback: 1984 Canada Cup semi-final overtime period, Canada vs. the Soviet Union.

Paul Coffey was the last man back as the Soviets rushed into the Canadian zone. The Malton native not only broke up the play, but grabbed the puck, raced up ice, banked a point shot off teammate Mike Bossy, and secured the win for Canada - and his own place in hockey history.

The play was pure Paul Coffey: instinctive, explosive, and game changing.

It was an early exclamation point on a career filled with them.

The first came when he was picked sixth overall in the 1980 entry draft, the highest by any product of the Mississauga minor hockey system.

He joined the perfect team in which to express his burgeoning talents: the Edmonton Oilers. He became one of the club's fab five: Gretzky, Messier, Coffey, Fuhr and Kurri. This five-pointed star dominated the NHL for half-a-decade. Coffey's career seemed sprinkled with gold dust from the get-go.

This week at Mississauga city council, he was sprinkled again, this time with something he'd longed for most of his life: home town recognition.

Council voted to rename Wildwood Park and Malton Arena after him.

The biggest question is what took them so long?

Coffey is arguably the greatest athlete ever produced in this city's history - at least the one with the most laurel leaves.

- Four Stanley Cups
- A member of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame,

- A member of the NHL hall of fame
- A member of the Mississauga Sports Halls of Fame

• The second highest scoring defenceman in NHL history

• Fourteen (14!) all-star selections

• Three-time Norris Cup winner,

symbolic of best defenceman in the NHL.

But rings and scoring exploits and inductions took a back-

seat to having his hometown rink (the place where he grew up and honed his talents) named after him.

It puts a nice, neat bow on a career that was one for the ages.

He ranks that recognition near the top of what he's accomplished in his life.

Why cities fail to honour athletes like they do scientists, educators, doctors, and even politicians, is a mystery to me.

Some athletes have that genius code embedded in their DNA, and early on Coffey mastered that most difficult to capture athletic pursuit: good timing.

You saw it in his magisterial skating style. You saw it in his ability to operate a power play. You saw it when he led Canada to the '84 Canada Cup.

After his career, he used his hockey acumen to help coach other budding stars like Mikey McLeod, one of the best players on the Mississauga Steelheads, a guaranteed first round selection in this summer's NHL entry draft.

Coffey continues to tutor youngsters in his post-playing career.

Mississauga is now one of the top producers of high-quality talent in the world of hockey, with names like McLeod, the Strome brothers and others destined for stardom.

But it wasn't always so.

Coffey was our first super star, an outlier.

His career accomplishments put this city on the sports map as a producer of high-end talent.

He was a made-in-Malton success story, writ large.

Finally, Malton (Mississauga) gave him what he most desired: his name on his hometown rink. I'm thinking the timing couldn't have been better.