

NHL great Coffey humbled by arena renaming

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During his distinguished NHL career, Paul Coffey would proudly tell people Malton was his hometown.

He often had to correct people when they thought he meant Milton.

"They'd say where is it and I'd say it's by the airport," Coffey said Friday in front of thousands as Malton Arena and neighbouring Wildwood Park was officially renamed in his honour.

"Then they'd say is that in Mississauga and I'd say absolutely, it's the capital."

Friday's ceremony left the Hockey Hall of Famer truly honoured and humbled.

The push to rename the complex was spearheaded by Ward 5 Councillor Carolyn Parrish and his best friend Iannelli, both of whom had kind words to say about Malton's favourite son.

Emcee - and unofficial roastmaster - Mike Bullard joked about both Coffey and the arena being really old and in need of a face lift before explaining that Coffey has a great sense of community, which was evident as Coffey fought back a few tears dur-



Legendary hockey player Paul Coffey (left) shares a laugh with best friend Joe Iannelli during the renaming of an arena and park in his name on Friday. Iain Colpitts/Metroland

ing his speech.

Sticking with the comedic nature of Friday's festivities, Coffey shared a story about his drive over to the rink. As he was carrying his son's hockey equipment to his car, he had a playful exchange with a neighbour.

"He said buddy, give it up you're too old," Coffey recalled. "I said, oh yeah? Well do you have an arena named after you?"

Before he stepped up to the podium, Iannelli, Crombie and former Edmonton Oilers

teammate Kevin Lowe all shared their kind words for the legendary defenceman.

Iannelli, now production director for Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, admitted he wasn't a very good athlete growing up, but he said Coffey would always pick him to be on his team because of his work ethic.

He believes moves like that embody the spirit of Malton.

"That's part of his philosophy in life," Iannelli said.

"He loves people that work hard and try. That's why he loves this community so much because we're a bunch of hard working people. That's what makes Malton strong."

Lowe, now vice chairman and alternate governor for the Oilers Entertainment Group, was one of the many people Coffey encountered who wasn't sure where Malton was.

When they played together on the Edmonton Oilers and flew into Toronto, Coffey would proudly point it out to him.

He hopes Malton's youth have that pride in their community as well.

"Almost 35 years ago, we started together as young hockey players," Lowe said. "Hopefully with the inspiration this arena will have for future hockey players, perhaps someday there will be another great coming from Malton."

Coffey played hockey, lacrosse, baseball and soccer in Malton and grew up looking up to other great athletes from the area such as Doug Dunville, Marty McNally, Duffy McCarthy and Jimmy Roberts.

He hoped to be like them one day and clearly surpassed their accomplishments.

"My dad said if you could be anything like those guys, you'll go places," he said.