



ONE OF OUR OWN

PATRICK MARLEAU CELEBRATES
1,000 GAMES IN TEAL

By Tony Khing

Many things have changed since Patrick Marleau made his debut with the San Jose Sharks in 1997 as an 18-year-old.

He's gone through three head coaches. He's been here for the team's 10th and 20th anniversaries and has worn each of the eight sweater styles. He's been on all five Pacific Division Champion teams and both Western Conference finalists. He's only one of two players (Marco Sturm of Washington is the other) from that first year still active in the National Hockey League.

Of course, the now 31-year-old Marleau has changed, too. But not in the ways that matter most.

"He's that small town kid who's unassuming, quiet and a perfect gentleman," said Equipment Manager Mike Aldrich, who's been with the Sharks since Marleau's first game. "Fame and fortune hasn't changed Patrick Marleau one bit."

Aldrich, who's seen many shades of players in nearly two decades as a hockey equipment manager, isn't the only one who feels that way.

"For good or bad, he's still remained Patty," said Drew Remenda, the Sharks television color analyst. "He's gone through a lot of different coaches, different styles and different teammates. He's been able to keep himself."

The Sharks have seen numerous players participate in their 1,000th NHL game while wearing teal. However, players such as Bob Rouse and Gaetan Duchesne had played elsewhere and were at the sunsets of their long careers. But until Jan. 17 in Phoenix, no one had played in 1,000 games with the Sharks and had reached that milestone in his early 30s.

No one, that is, until Marleau.

"Growing up, you hoped something like this would happen," said Marleau, who was so young when he made his debut



Patrick Marleau scored the winning goal in overtime of Game Four of the 2010 Western Conference Semifinals vs. Detroit.

that his parents had to sign a waiver before his first regular season game. "I looked up to guys who stayed on one team and won championships like Steve Yzerman, Mario Lemieux and Joe Sakic. It's something to be said for those guys to stay in one spot and have success."

"I'm not surprised or amazed that he's

played in 1,000 games," said Kelly Hrudey, one of Marleau's first Sharks teammates. "When we saw him in that first training camp, we knew he was going to have a brilliant career."

"When I was playing with Patty, he had a staggering amount of games for such a young guy. I think it was 600-700," said

COVER STORY

Alyn McCauley, Marleau's teammate from 2002-03 to 2005-06. "He's been a very consistent player. That's hard to find. It's quite a feat."

Why has Marleau played in San Jose for so long? Why is Marleau atop the Sharks all-time leaders in numerous offensive categories?

Let's start with character. Marleau was the second overall selection, behind future teammate Joe Thornton, in the 1997 NHL Entry Draft. Sure, Marleau had been away from home for two years while playing juniors with Seattle of the Western Hockey League. He already experienced living with a billet and being away from his native Saskatchewan.

But now, he was under the bright lights of the NHL — the ultimate stop for any young and ambitious hockey player. Fortunately for Marleau, he came to the right place.

Dean Lombardi, San Jose's executive vice president and general manager at the time, was in the early stages of building a foundation that still exists today. As part of the construction, Lombardi brought in experienced veterans such as Hradey, Tony Granato and Bernie Nicholls to teach the young Sharks how to play like mature professionals.

Marleau said being around those players — as well as others such as Murray Craven, Mike Ricci and Gary Suter — also helped.

"These guys were professionals," Marleau said. "All of these guys were professionals in the way they approached the game and everything around it. You learned by watching or having them talk to you."

"The biggest thing I could take away from everybody was the commitment to being ready every night," Marleau added. "It's a long season and a lot of games. You have to get into a routine. That makes for a more fun season."

"Patty leads by example," said Ryane Clowe, Marleau's teammate since 2005. "If anything, I've learned how to prepare myself. He takes care of himself and



Patrick Marleau as a rookie in 1997-98.

MARLEAU MOMENTS

FIRST NHL GAME...Oct. 1, 1997 vs. Edmonton. San Jose lost the game, 5-3. Marleau had three shots. Among the former/future Sharks playing for Edmonton: Mike Grier, Bryan Marchment and Ray Whitney.

FIRST POINT...Oct. 11, 1997 vs. Boston. A 5-2 San Jose win. Marleau assisted on Viktor Kozlov's goal at 6:25 of the second period. Future teammate Joe Thornton skated for Boston, wore No. 6 and was a minus-1.

FIRST GOAL...Oct. 19, 1997 at Phoenix. Marleau, 18, scored the last goal in a 5-3 loss. Bill Houlder and Owen Nolan got the assists at 19:34 of the third period. Marleau was the second youngest player to score a goal in an NHL game since World War II.

FIRST HAT TRICK...April 6, 2002 vs. Detroit. Marleau had half of San Jose's goals in a 6-3 win. He scored the first goal of the game. His last two came in the second period, each assisted by Marco Sturm.



prepares himself well for games.”

“He works so hard,” Thornton said.

Hrudey, who tended the nets for the Kings during their lone Stanley Cup Finals run in 1993, went a step further to help the teenaged Marleau that first year.

“I remember going home one day during training camp and saying to my wife, ‘I’m thinking about having this young guy come and live with us,’” Hrudey said. After she and Lombardi approved the idea, Hrudey, his wife, three daughters and Marleau all went to dinner one night to see if the entire family was in agreement.

“He fit in just beautifully,” Hrudey said. “Our kids loved him and looked up to him as a big brother.

“The memories I treasure the most are those after the games when we’d come back and have a bite to eat,” Hrudey continued. “Most often it would be me, Patrick and my wife. We’d talk about hockey, life and family.

“There was something about Patrick that I really liked,” Hrudey concluded about Marleau, who lived in his guest house that first year. “He reminded me of me. I wasn’t one to flap my lips because I needed to hear myself talk. Patrick was the same way. He was thoughtful.”

While Marleau needed to develop that professional character, he already had a strong foundation. He has credited his family and his upbringing. No NHL veteran can help someone develop certain human skills.

“I’ve known him for a long time,” Executive Vice President and General Manager Doug Wilson said. “He comes from a wonderful family. He’s truly a good person.”

“He’s an honest person,” McCauley said about Marleau. “It’s not always a common pairing in a hockey player where you have a guy who’s an elite player carry himself in a professional manner and in a proper way away from the rink. Patty impressed me from the very first day.”

The character and the foundation have been tested over the years. Many hockey media types have criticized his laid-back



Patrick Marleau is honored for his 1,000th game on Feb. 1. Standing with him are his parents, wife and children and Executive Vice President and General Manager Doug Wilson.

THE MARLEAU FILE

- wore No. 14 from 1997-98 until 2001-02
- famous people in cell phone directory: Minnesota Twins star Justin Morneau, Pittsburgh Penguins Captain Sidney Crosby and Mike Ricci
- favorite holiday is Christmas
- first job: shoveling grain
- favorite off-ice activities: playing golf and spending time with family
- hockey idol: Mario Lemieux
- favorite web site: yahoo.com
- claims to speak “toddlerease” (“Does that count?” Marleau once asked)

personality. They’ve critiqued him for his lack of fire. And they voiced their feelings when Rob Blake took over as team captain in 2009-10.

But Marleau has responded strong each time.

For those questioning his approach, there’s a reason why. “That’s by design,” Remenda said. “One of his biggest influences was Vinny Damphousse (who played for the Sharks from 1998-2004). He loved the way he was even-keeled. It doesn’t mean he doesn’t care. He just works really hard at being even-keeled.”

“You have to know how to motivate yourself and not have a lot of ups and downs,” Marleau said. “You’re still going to have them, but to be able to cut the downs off at two or three games is huge.”

One can’t lack fire and passion to play in more than 1,000 NHL games and to win a gold medal at the 2010 Winter Olympics for their country, either. “His competitive fire runs deep,” Wilson said. “He wants to be a great player and to be in a situation where there’s a lot of pressure and challenges. He’s learned the things you need to do to be a high-end player.



He's comfortable in being himself and saying the things that need to be said.

"To be chosen for the Canadian Olympic team, which was the hardest hockey team in the last 20 years to be selected on," Wilson added, "was warranted and deserved and that should speak volumes."

And when Blake replaced Marleau in 2009 after being captain for five years, all Marleau did was respond with a career-high 44 goals, was second on the team in the postseason with eight tallies and helped the Sharks reach their second Western Conference Finals.

"He accepted that and challenged himself," teammate Joe Pavelski said. "He got better. It speaks high volumes about him as a person."

"That's how you respond," Wilson said. "He arguably had his best year. That's how a professional responds. It's easy to be a great guy when things are going well. If you want to find out about people, throw in a little adversity and a challenge. And he responded the way we knew he would respond."

Those who know Marleau well knew how he would react to the change. He knew the decision wasn't about him. He knew it was about the team.

"I'm here to win games," Marleau said. "If that was going to better the team, then I was for it. I don't have a Stanley Cup and I'll do whatever it takes to win one."

Another piece of Marleau's make up is his loyalty. During the last offseason, he passed up on a chance at free agency to stay with the only NHL team he's known.

"He had the option to go elsewhere for more money and a longer term," Wilson said. "But he made a true commitment to be here and I have admiration for that. So do his teammates and coaches."

"I want to stay here and win a Stanley Cup," Marleau said. "The biggest thing, personally, is to strive to get better and help young guys coming up and pass along some of the experiences that I was taught throughout my years and to make this team a better team."



Patrick Marleau and Phoenix's Shane Doan have played in 1,000-plus games only for their respective clubs.



(left) Patrick Marleau graduating from high school. (right) Skating with Wayne Gretzky at the 2004 World Cup of Hockey training camp for Team Canada.



Over the last 14 years, Marleau has kept and developed core values people admire. However, some have a hard time contemplating that Marleau has been a Shark since Bill Clinton was in his second term as president.

"I still call him a kid and think of him as a kid," said Mike Ricci, Marleau's teammate from 1997-04 and now development coach. "It's weird because I still remember him as a kid. When I first met him, he could barely talk. I thought he was French because he never talked. Now we joke around and have fun. He's come out of his shell. It's been good to watch."

"He's now a family man," Aldrich said. "He's got kids, owns a home and that's still hard for me to believe. He's like having a son. It's like watching one of your own kids grow up."

"It does fly by so quickly," Thornton said. "Patty was an 18-year-old. Now he's got two kids with another one on the way. He's now a man, and boy, it does go by quick."

Fortunately, Sharks fans have had the privilege of seeing a boy turn into a man.



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