

# CHAPMAN RETIRES AFTER DECORATED LACROSSE CAREER

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At his first Toronto Rock training camp, Sandy Chapman found himself looking up to the team's veteran players.

He wasn't in awe of them - he didn't know enough to realize that he should be.

To that point, Chapman had only seen one professional lacrosse game; his minor lacrosse coach took his Acton Rams team to see a Buffalo Bandits game. Chapman, 11 at the time, and his teammates got autographs from the Bandits' stars like John Tavares and Gary Gait.

But it would be more than a decade before Chapman would see another pro game. And he wouldn't need a ticket for that one.

He had never dreamed of playing pro lacrosse; because the National Lacrosse League didn't arrive in Ontario until he was playing junior, he had never given it much thought. Instead, he hoped to play for the Brampton Excelsiors major team.

But in his final year of junior, his coach Eddie Comeau told him that playing in the NLL was a possibility. Comeau was an assistant coach with Toronto Rock, and he told Chapman that he might not want to go too far from home on the night of the NLL draft.

"It was only a land line then," Chapman said, laughing at a world without cellphones. "So, a group of guys came over to the house."

Sure enough, the phone rang early in the evening: Toronto was certainly interested. They took Chapman with their first pick, 12th overall.

Four months later, the 20-year-old was in training



Ryan McCullough

Acton native Sandy Chapman retired following a 17-year career in the National Lacrosse. Chapman won five NLL championships and was named the league's best defensive player in 2010.

camp, literally looking up to the players that would become his teammates.

"The size of those men," Chapman said. "I'm going up against Dan Ladouceur, who is 6-6 - and at the time I'm 5-8 and probably 165 pounds. It was a complete eye-opener."

Late in the Rock's training camp, coach Les Bartley told Chapman that he had made the team. Two days later, he was on the floor for the second pro game he had

ever seen.

When the NLL season opens Saturday, it will do so for the first time since 2002 without Chapman.

After 17 seasons, 283 games including playoffs (seventh most in NLL history), and five league championships, Chapman retired.

One of the top defensive players in the league, Chapman said that he could see things coming to an end in the past year.

"There are just parts of your game that you don't have the same confidence in," the 37-year-old said. "You see the old guard moving on. I could probably go out and battle and do OK, but the guys coming out of college today, they are absolute athletes - with how physically fit and polished they are at 22."

Chapman may not have had the polish of the players entering the league now, but he played an important

role in helping his teams shine.

His first two seasons in the National Lacrosse League ended with the Rock hoisting the championship trophy; Toronto won again two years later.

"Guys always say this, but when you win early, you don't really appreciate it. [Winning] seemed like the norm - it's what was expected, and we found a way to be really competitive in Toronto."

After his fourth season, he was selected by Edmonton in the NLL's expansion draft, but was traded to Rochester. In his second season with the Knight-hawks, Chapman won his fourth championship.

Reacquired by Toronto in 2010, Chapman was named a first-team all-pro and league's defensive player of the year. Chapman said that with so many strong defensive players on the Rock, it could have gone to any of them. But he said he found a niche in Toronto's defensive system.

"Before it was even a term, I was a grinder. It's the way I had to play, and it was the way I knew best. I had to play like I was a six-foot [tall] player," said Chapman, who was the Rock's career leader in forced turnovers and one of only 16 players in league history to scoop up more than 1,000 loose balls. "Things fell into place for me: all the way up, I played both ways, but I was never a goal scorer. I had very little offensive skill; I met all the right coaches at the right time. Toronto went to a pressure defence, which is where my skill set was needed."

That year, Toronto lost the NLL final to the Washington Stealth, and for Chapman, watching their opponents celebrate drove home how fortunate he had been in his career - reminding him that you never know when you'll get the chance to win again.

He didn't have to wait long, though. In 2011, Chapman pulled off a rare feat; the Rock returned to the NLL final, where they edged the Stealth 8-7. A week later, Chapman joined Team Canada in the Czech Republic, where he

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