



## Gretzky was indeed great

It is now ten days A. W. (After Wayne) and even though the National Hockey League playoffs are nicely under way, I can't help but feel that something is missing.

That something, of course, is Wayne Gretzky.

When the Great One announced his retirement at the ripe old age of 38 last Sunday (Imagine being able to retire at 38!) the NHL lost its finest citizen. Yes, there have been great players before Gretzky and there will be great players after him, but Gretzky was unquestionably THE greatest player to ever play our favorite sport.

Watching his press conferences—both in Ottawa last Friday and Sunday in New York—I loudly lamented Gretzky's decision to hang up his skates despite the fact he is still among the best players in the game.

An entire generation of NHL fans have no idea what the league is like without Gretzky while others, like myself, find that his 20 years of domination has blurred the memory of what the NHL was like pre-Gretzky.

As I soaked in the retirement circus that surrounded Gretzky in his final days as an NHLer, wifey remained decidedly uninterested in the slice of history that was unfolding.

"So what if he's retiring," she said. "He's just another multi-millionaire athlete. He's not a hero. Who cares what he does."

I could have countered that her interest in Princess Diana— waking up at 4 a.m. to catch the royal wedding, watching her funeral— was equal to my interest in Gretzky's retirement. But I didn't. Since she's not a hockey fan, I concluded it was simply impossible for her to understand what Wayne Gretzky did for the sport of hockey.

With Gretzky, you got the entire package of what an athlete should be. Talented on the playing surface, unselfish with his time to numerous charitable causes, a promoter of THIS
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THAT

John McGhie

his sport and, unbelievably accommodating to the media.

Unlike the Dennis Rodmans, Karl Malones, Albert Belles and Roger Clemenses— to name a few— of other sports, Gretzky was never boastful, he didn't put himself before his teammates, he was never involved in a scandal involving drugs, violence or prostitutes. He was as classy off the ice as he was talented on it.

I hated Gretzky when he led the Los Angeles Kings to a seven-game win over my beloved Toronto Maple Leafs in the 1994 semi-finals. I prayed he would come down with a case of the flu—anything to prevent him from working his magic. In the final game of that series in Toronto he put on a clinic, collecting five points in a 5-4 Los Angeles win.

Clearly, he is no longer the player he was, but he is far from washed up. It is because he still has so much talent that when rumours of his retirement first surfaced last week I was hoping he would tell us all it wasn't so.

However, when I watched his press conference last Friday in Ottawa I couldn't help but notice the smile on Gretzky's face. He looked like a man who just finished a difficult job. He looked contented.

It was then I realized that wanting Gretzky to remain was only selfishness on the part of this fan. Gretzky has earned his retirement.

