

A HALL OF FAME STAMP ON SENSATIONAL CAREER

HAYDAR HONOURED BY HIS HOMETOWN, AND THE AHL

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Too small. Not fast enough.

Darren Haydar heard all the critiques.

"I remember it as clear as day," Haydar recalls, "Standing in the Thompson Road Arena and a parent said to my parents, 'It's too bad Darren's not going to be on the team next year when body contact starts.' That motivated me."

Of course, he was on the team the next year. Still scoring like he always had.

Still, the doubters persisted. At 5-foot-9, he won't be able to do that at the next level, they would say, only to be proven wrong once again.

There was only one level of hockey that Haydar truly never got the chance to prove himself and that was the NHL. He played 23 games over four seasons with three teams, scoring eight points with limited ice time.

But even off the ice, Haydar was a step ahead. Years ahead actually.

"I didn't agree with the philosophy at the time of how teams were built,"

Haydar said. "You had two scoring lines, a checking line and a line of fighters."

Today, the line of fighters is all but extinct, making room for smaller, skilled players like Haydar to develop and flourish.

"I'm definitely excited about where the game is now," Haydar says.

Instead of dwelling on what eluded him, the 40-year-old has come to cherish what he accomplished in a career that saw him win two Calder Cups, and will see him enshrined in the American Hockey League Hall of Fame in January.

"I appreciate it more now, especially at this stage," Haydar says. "At the time I felt I deserved to be (in the NHL), so that competitor, that drive in me, just kept me going after that. But I look back now and I got to play hockey for a living for 14 years."

The honours have come close to home as well. Haydar was honoured by his hometown last Thursday (Nov. 14), inducted into the Milton Sports Hall of Fame.

"It's such a great honour. There's no real words to show how grateful I am," Haydar said. "So many people in the community supported me. Other parents taking me to hockey on the weekends



Darren Haydar, shown with the Grand Rapids Griffins during his 11-year American Hockey League career, was inducted into the Milton Sports Hall of Fame Thursday. He will also join the AHL Hall of Fame in January.

Hamilton Spectator

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-Darren Haydar, Milton Sports Hall of Fame inductee

while my parents were taking my brothers to games. It really does take community. And that's something you really appreciate is the sense of

community in a town like Milton."

Milton is where Haydar first showed the promise that would lead to his honours. As a 16-year-old on

his hometown Merchants — playing against the 20-year-olds who were going to push him around — he racked up 100 points. He followed that with a then

JOINING HAYDAR IN MILTON SPORTS HALL OF FAME ARE...

Janet Campbell

The driving force behind the Milton Springers' success and evolution, Janet Campbell spent 30 years as the local gymnastics club's head coach and chief administrator.

She helped mold a number of athletes who'd go on to success at the university and national level.

Neil Teague

A dependable slugger at every level of competitive softball, Neil Teague racked up a slew of individual accolades and team titles on the provincial, national and international stage over an esteemed 38-year career. He's now helping mold young talent as a sought-after coach.

Jim Ridley

Synonymous with Canadian baseball, Jim Ridley was an outfielder with the Milwaukee Braves in the mid-60s before his 26 years as a scout with the Blue Jays — where he was the driving force behind such notable signings as Paul Spoljaric, Rob Butler and David Corrente.

Leon Stickle

A self-described 'terrible referee-baiter' as a young player, Leon Stickle would ironically go on to an illustrious 27-year career as an official in the NHL. That included six Stanley Cup finals, four all-star games and more than 2,200 regular season and playoff games.

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