

NHL HOCKEY PLAYOFFS: Former Markham resident Steve Thomas wants to be part of a Stanley Cup victory this year

Thomas eager to bring Cup home

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

While Toronto Maple Leafs fans everywhere are hoping this spring marks the end of their team's 32-year Stanley Cup drought, Steve Thomas is out to fulfill a dream of his own.

The Markham native and star Leaf player has yet to be on a Stanley Cup winner during an impressive 16-year National

Hockey League career that has seen him suit up with four different teams. He was with the New York Islanders when they advanced to the conference finals against the Montreal Canadiens in 1993. The Habs swept that series, then went on to defeat the Los Angeles Kings in the Cup final.

"Stevie's reaching for new horizons," Warren Thomas, Steve's father, said yesterday during an interview. "This is the furthest he's ever gone."

The elder Thomas said his son, who is looking to help the Leafs oust the Buffalo Sabres in this year's conference final, has had his sights set on winning the Stanley Cup since his NHL career began.

"He's very professional about it. He knows what he wants." He said Steve senses this may be the year he finally gets to drink champagne from the coveted Cup. "He could chew on the Stanley Cup he wants it so bad."

Steve, who will be 36 in July, started his career with the Leafs as a 20-year-old rookie. After three years he was dealt to the Chicago Black Hawks. He went on to play with the Islanders and the New Jersey Devils before inking a two-year contract, with an option year, with the Leafs last summer.

According to Warren Thomas, his son would have been a Leaf for life if he had his way.

"Stevie would never have left Toronto in the first place. They had the makings of a good team. But they weren't patient. They wanted it right away."

But that's all changed now, he said. His son is part of a well-run, well-coached Leaf team that has just the right mix of youth and experience, along with lots of character. "It's desire. They just keep coming back."

He said Steve's influence has been felt by the younger players. "I think Stevie claims respect wherever he goes. They think he's a warrior."

He feels much of that respect comes from the fact that Steve has always worked hard throughout his career. "He's never been the gifted player that (Wayne) Gretzky or (Mario) Lemieux were. But he's a hard worker."

Warren said his son has found himself caught up in the excitement along with all the Leafs fans. "He's over the moon



Toronto Maple Leaf Steve Thomas, left, posed earlier this year at Maple Leaf Gardens with former Markham Waxer teammate and current Washington Capital's centre Adam Oates. Both players had their numbers retired by the Waxers.

now. He wants to contribute so badly." Thomas said he hasn't talked to his son since after Tuesday night's 6-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres in game two of the conference final. While Thursday's loss was a set back, he thinks the Leafs can bounce back once again. "If they can win Saturday night they regain home ice advantage."

Warren Thomas thinks the Leafs will probably get another crack at it if they should fall short this time. "With or without Steve they should have a good team for a long time."

He says it would put the cap on his son's career to win the Cup with the Leafs this spring.

"The guys from Toronto. What better way to finish your career than by winning a Stanley Cup in Toronto? The chance is there."

What are Steve Thomas' plans once the season is finally done? "He just bought a house in Toronto and he plans to renovate it," Thomas said.

Father's

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