

Hey, kid, you've just been traded

Athletes, including Stouffville's Cory Tanaka, roll with punches when they get dealt

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Let's make a deal. Sports trades often whet fans' appetites, especially if they bolster their favourite team's chances at a championship.

Some players welcome a trade. Others, not so much.

But, all must eventually acknowledge it's a part of the game.

"You don't know from one day to the next where you will be unless you have a no-trade clause in your contract," said Steve Thomas, a 45-year-old former Markham resident who was dealt four times during his 20-year NHL career.

"When you're traded, it's because another team wants you," said Syl Apps Jr., a 61-year-old Unionville resident who was part of two trades during his 10-year NHL career that included stints with the New York Rangers, Pittsburgh Penguins and Los Angeles Kings. "It's a part of the business."

Drafted by the Rangers in 1964, Apps felt his acquisition by the Penguins in 1970-71, along with defenceman Sheldon Kannegiesser in exchange for Glen Sather, was a turning point in his NHL career.

During his eight seasons there, he led them in scoring three times and played in the 1975 NHL All-Star Game.

"When I got traded to Pittsburgh, it turned out to be good for me because I wasn't playing much in New York," he said. "At that time, they had a wealth of talent."

"But it was still a shock. No one expects to be traded unless the writing is on the wall."

While Apps enjoyed his time in Pittsburgh, being shipped to the Kings in 1977-78 with Hartland Monahan for Dave Schultz, Gene Carr and the Kings' fourth-round choice in 1978 amateur draft, was a tougher pill to swallow. Especially since he had forged plenty of friendships during his time in the Steel City.

"Everyone likes some degree of consistency in their lives," said Apps, who retired two years later with 183 goals and 423 assists in 727 games. "But, at that time, Pittsburgh was trying to change their team. You've just got to go forward with it. It was hard to deal with."

Thomas had two tours of duty

with the Toronto Maple Leafs and Chicago Blackhawks, as well as stints with the New York Islanders, New Jersey Devils, Anaheim Ducks and Detroit Red Wings.

The first time he was dealt, to the Blackhawks in 1987 with Rick Vaive and Bob McGill from Toronto for Al Secord and Ed Olczyk, it was largely over contract issues.

A couple of thousand extra dollars, to be exact.

"In retrospect, it was a mistake because the grass isn't always greener on the other side," he said. "Toronto was my home and it was where I wanted to play and stay even though I enjoyed my time in Chicago."

Thomas was surprised when he was shipped to the New York Islanders with Adam Creighton from the Blackhawks 11 games into the 1991-92 season for Brent Sutter and Brad Lauer.

"I got off the ice from practice and I was called into the coach's office," he said. "They told me I was traded."

"That was a shock because I had just come off a 35-goal year."

"But you have your family with you and all of a sudden when you're traded, they are the ones who have to pick up, pack up or sell the house and go. I just have to put my bag (hockey equipment) together and go the next day."

Involved in two trades since launching his NHL career in 2001-02 with the New York Islanders, Columbus Blue Jackets' forward Raffi Torres said there is always a degree of surprise.

But the 27-year-old Markham native feels the after-

shocks aren't as serious once you've been through the ringer once.

Such was the case when he was dealt for a second time in his career this past summer to the Blue Jackets for Gilbert

"The first time when I

was traded to Edmonton from the Islanders (in 2003 along with Brad Isbister for Janne Niinimaa, second- and fourth-round draft picks in the 2003 NHL entry draft), they told me I wasn't going anywhere," he said. "But 48 hours later, I was traded."

"This time around, I feel that I'm a little wiser now and I was better prepared for it. It's part of the business and I realize this might not be the last time I get traded."

For younger players in the junior ranks, trades can be intimidating, as Cory Tanaka discovered when he was 17.

Drafted by the Plymouth Whalers of the Ontario Hockey League in 2004, the Stouffville resident played with the Detroit-area team in 2004-05 and just 21 games into the 2005-06 season before he was traded to the Belleville Bulls.

"The first couple of times when I saw guys get traded, I was a little shook up," he said. "I was just a young kid then. But after a while you kind of get used to it."

Tanaka, now 20, is still a member of the Bulls.

"When I got traded, it was a bit of a surprise because I was young

and was just there for a little (more than) one season," he said. "But the Whalers were going for the title that year and they traded some of their younger guys for veterans."

Tanaka harboured no regrets. He was part of the Bulls team that went to the Memorial Cup last year.

"I've learned that trades are a part of the business. I've seen a couple of close friends get traded and, usually, they work out for the best. Guys get more ice time and they become a bigger presence on the team," he said.

For players one level down in the Jr. A Ontario Junior Hockey League, trades can be a springboard to better exposure.

Recently dealt by the Stouffville Spirit to the Grande Prairie Storm of the Alberta Junior Hockey League for cash, 20-year-old forward Matt Viola requested a move hoping it might improve his chances of earning an NCAA scholarship to a United States university team.

"I asked for the trade. It was going through my mind for a while. I wanted to see if things would turn around with the Spirit. Things weren't going too well so I called the coach out west. He said me play before and he was more than happy to bring me here," Viola said from Grande Prairie.

It was his third transaction in as many seasons.

Starting his Tier 2 junior A career with the Newmarket Hurricanes two years ago, Viola was dealt to the Dixie Beehives.

Last season, he began the year with the Beehives before the Spirit acquired him for Scott Johnstone.

In both instances, Viola figured he would be dealt.

The Hurricanes were building a veteran team as hosts of the central Canadian championships.

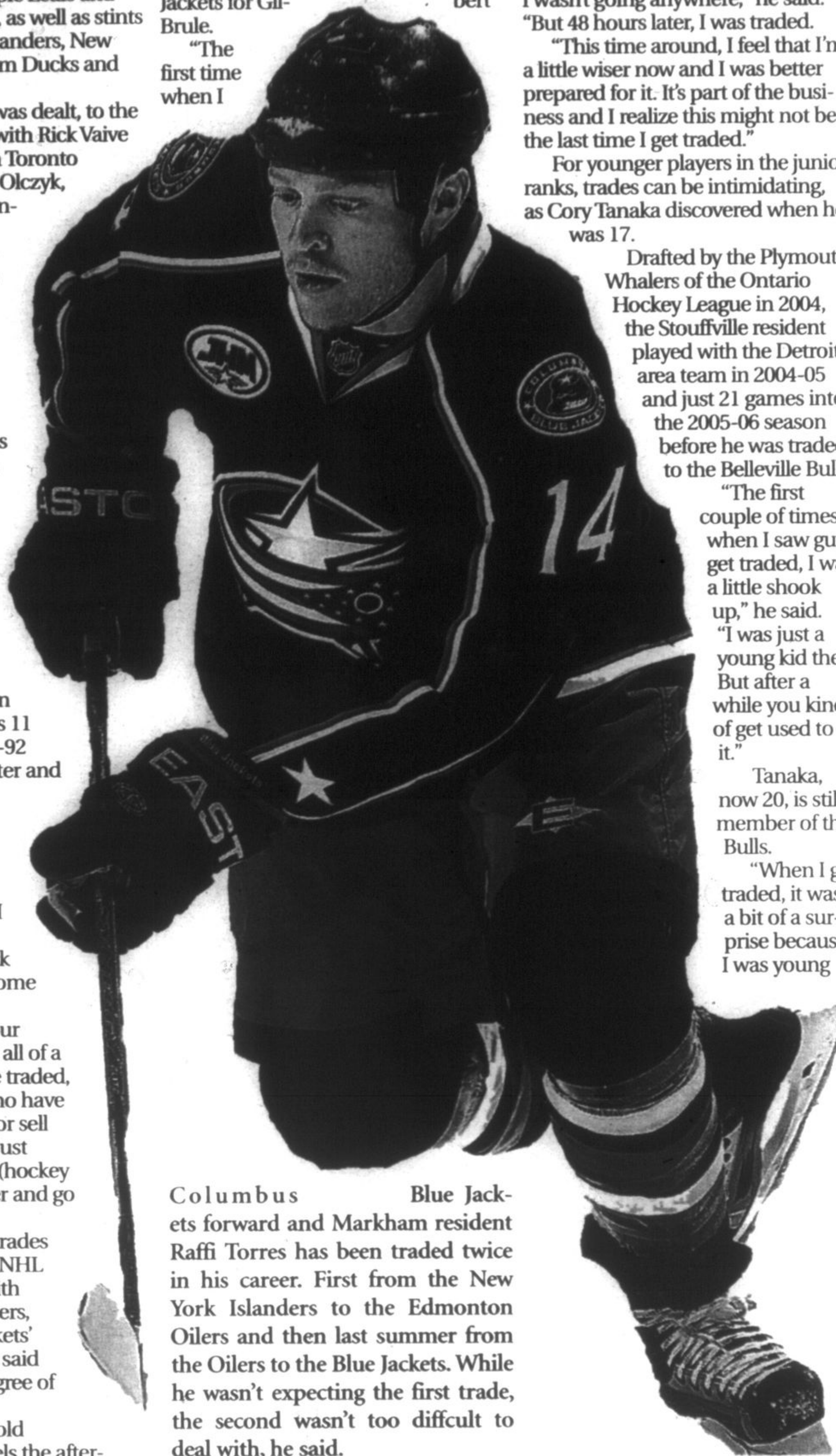
Dixie changed its coaching staff and its roster.

And it isn't just limited to hockey.

When Newmarket resident Peter Orr was released by the Atlanta Braves at the end of the 2007 major league baseball season, he was disappointed.

But the 29-year-old utility infielder signed a minor league contract with the Washington Nationals just a few months later and re-signed another minor league deal with the national league club this fall.

Orr believes it's best to go out, tend to business between the foul lines and play the game as he can.



Columbus Blue Jackets forward and Markham resident Raffi Torres has been traded twice in his career. First from the New York Islanders to the Edmonton Oilers and then last summer from the Oilers to the Blue Jackets. While he wasn't expecting the first trade, the second wasn't too difficult to deal with, he said.

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