

Hockey player agent happy to start with minor leaguers

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Hockey has been a big part of Russ King's life.

Not just as a youngster growing up in Whitchurch-Stouffville, where he played five seasons of minor hockey and was part of an Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship midget team.

The game still remains integral for the 44-year-old Stouffville resident. He hopes to assist players with aspirations of playing professionally.

Operating a sports management com-

pany known as Kingdom Player Management, King recently took a giant step in his profession after earning his National Hockey League Players Association certification.

"Stouffville was a big part of where I am now," he said. "They have a well-run minor hockey organization and as far as I could remember we had good rep teams."

FORMER LEAF EXECUTIVE

The idea of becoming an agent came out of a meeting five years ago with former NHL agent and Toronto Maple Leafs assistant general manager Bill Watters and his son Brad, former president of the Toronto Rock lacrosse

club and owner of the now defunct Ottawa Renegades of the Canadian Football League.

"Brad and I became good friends and I told him that I had an interest in sports management," King said. "We got talking and Brad said 'let's go see my dad (Bill)'. I met Bill at the Miller Tavern (in Toronto) and he said to me 'Kid, you'll never do it. The big guys have it all wrapped up'.

"I knew it would be a tough profession to get into. But I explained to Bill my process and he thought it was a good idea and from there I've just kept plugging away.

"I was quite fortunate. Meetings like the one I had with Bill and Brad happen for a reason."

Noting the elder Watters remains his ultimate mentor, King took courses to assist him in his profession. He then started working with players in the lower professional leagues.

"Sports management is like any other business where you have to start low and work your way up," he explained.

Three years ago, King got his baptism into the profession by working with former Stouffville Spirit player Mike Forgie.

"Mike wanted a contract done to play in the Southern Professional Hockey League and he put his trust in me," he said.

From there, King began to get referrals.

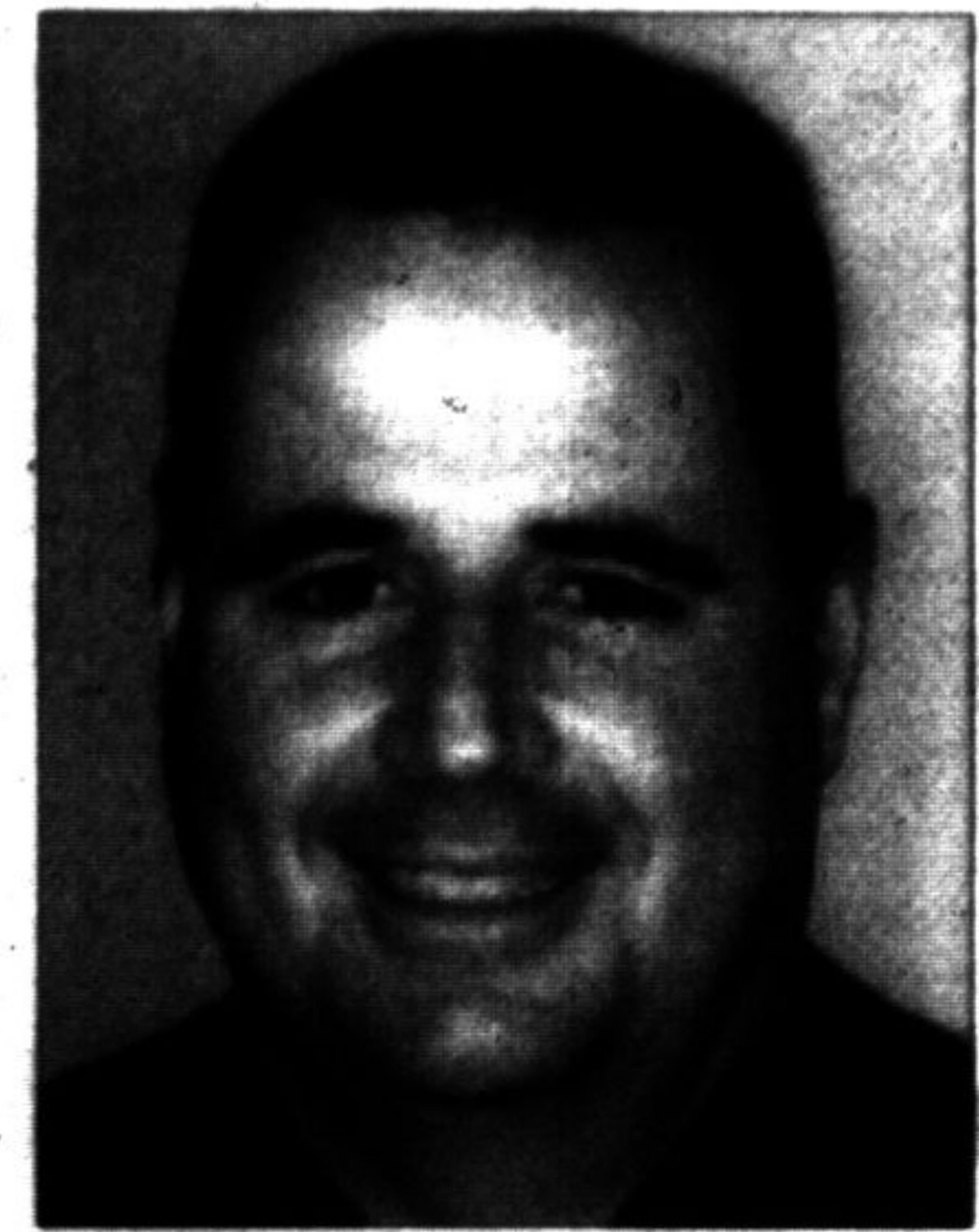
Some came from fitness guru Randy Smith, owner of BodySmith International in Gormley and Greg Roberts, brother of former NHL player Gary Roberts and a long-time minor hockey coach in Stouffville and Markham.

When King needed a boost in morale, Markham's Kevin Thistle, the president/general manager of Coppinwood Golf Club near Uxbridge, was there at his side.

"Kevin was a guy who kept telling me to keep plugging away, don't give up and that's what I did," King said.

Along with giving credit to his immediate family, King said he owed a lot to client Bobby Hughes, a fourth round pick of the Carolina Hurricanes in 2006 who is playing with the Fort Wayne Komets of the ECHL, and his family.

"It was definitely a long process," he said of gaining NHLPA certification. "For myself it



RUSS KING: Player agent thanks mentors, friends for helping him launch new career.

took almost four years with the actual National Hockey League Players Association stuff taken around four months in due part to the lockout last year, which delayed things."

Along with undergoing a 90-minute interview, King was required to fill out a 90-page application.

NHLPA CERTIFIED

He also had to provide seven references, including two from the financial field.

To maintain his NHLPA certification, King is required to have a player under a current one-way or two-way NHL contract. He can obtain temporary status if he is working with an NHL-drafted player.

Focusing his attention on seeking potential prospects toiling in the ECHL and the National Collegiate Athletic Association ranks, King says his business is coming along nicely.

He abides by a couple of simple rules he hopes will take him a long way in the profession: be smart, don't burn any bridges, thank people along the way.

"This is my passion," he said. "I'm learning so much and there's so much more to learn. I don't make it, it's not because I'm not trying."

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