

## TRY TO BEAT THAT!: THE 1978-79 BRANDON WHEAT KINGS

# Propp filled the net consistently Propp drawing a bead

BY PERRY BERGSON

Brian Propp's fingerprints remain all over the franchise records of the Brandon Wheat Kings, and it's hard to see that changing anytime soon.

In 213 regular season games — he missed just three contests in his entire three-year Western Hockey League career — Propp piled up an amazing 511 points. He also had 77 points in the playoffs and 11 at the 1979 Memorial Cup.

He even had a seven-goal game as a rookie on Jan. 25, 1977.

In 1999, he was named to the MasterCard Canadian Junior All-Time team alongside Mario Lemieux, Guy Lafleur, Bobby Orr, Denis Potvin and Bernie Parent. The WHL named him the 14th best player in league history in 2016.

In the 1979 draft, the Philadelphia Flyers grabbed him 14th overall in the first round, and he went to play 1,016 regular season games over 15 seasons, and 160 more playoff games.

He retired following the 1994-95 season in Europe.

Propp pursued opportunities in business and later real estate, and has recovered well from a stroke he suffered in 2015. He lives in New Jersey.

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "What can you say? The guy is unbelievable. It was a pleasure to play with Brian and watch him every night ... You just had to give it to him and it was in the back of the net."

**RAY ALLISON:** "Propper was pretty simple. He just scored goals, and all you had to do was get him the puck. It wasn't complicated or anything like that. The man lived to score goals. That's all he ever wanted to do and he was good at it. I think I played on his line for most of three years and all I had to do was get him the puck, and if he could get the shot off, he could score with the best of them."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "Brian was the most intense guy, even in practice. Sometimes we do three-on-three and it would be me, Stewie and Abby against Propp, Allison and Boschman, and I felt bad for Stewie because Abby and I didn't help him at all. Brian was real focused and real intense, and obviously a great hockey player."

**GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun):** "I can only think of one other player in the Western Hockey League who loved to score as much as Brian Propp, and that was Theo Fleury. Brian Propp just learned to love to score, had to score, wanted to score. If he was in a prime scoring area, he had to have the puck. He could skate and shoot the puck but he had that inner drive that he just absolutely had to score, and he wasn't going to let up in the third period if the score was 6-1."

**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "I lived at home at the time and he lived at a residence that wasn't too far away. I spent a lot of time with Brian. We were at the back of the bus and sat beside each other on all those trips. Brian was a great player, a sniper, a two-way player, very proficient junior for sure and had a great pro career as well."

**GREGG DRINNAN:** "One of the things Brian used to his real advantage was his ability with his stick, and not on the puck but on the opposing player. That earned him so much extra room."

**KELLY MCCRIMMON:** "His work ethic was off the charts. For our fans, in recent memory, everybody would respect and rave and admire Matt Calvert's work ethic, and Brian Propp worked like that. He was an incredibly hard worker. He loved to score so he shot the puck from everywhere and expected to score. He was really hard to handle in the offensive zone. He was so elusive, strong on his feet, great vision. He was an incredible junior."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "Brian was



Brian Propp

not the smoothest skater and didn't have the best hands in the world but scored because he caught goalies off guard so many times. He could score from anywhere. His shot was deceiving, he was tenacious, he was around the net for rebounds ... I bet 150 (of his points) were from inside the circles or closer. He had underrated skill. What a junior player and what a junior player. He was reliable game in and game out. You knew you were going to get the best of Brian Propp and his work ethic."

**WES COULSON:** "Brian was phenomenal. There wasn't anything he couldn't do. He could skate, he could shoot, he could pass and it was effortless. It seemed effortless to me. There were other guys who had to work really hard — and I'm not saying he didn't work hard — but it seemed to come naturally. He scored goals whenever he wanted to, it seemed like."

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "Propper was a free spirit when it really dawned to it. Without being too harsh about it, he just didn't give a s— about anything going on around him. He was so easy going, and nothing seemed to bother him. The one thing I



Brandon Wheat Kings star Brian Propp had plenty of opportunities to work on his goal-scoring celebration during the 1978-79 season. (Brandon Sun File Photo)

used to worry about with Brian was that we would be up by a bunch of goals and he would get bored. He would just kind of smirk and look at me and flip the puck straight into the air so the goalie would have to go into the corner to play it, and then he would go and nudge the goalie. Then everybody started pushing and shoving and the big scrum started. There's Propp, smiling on the side not doing anything. He started the s— and didn't finish it. He just did his thing. He wasn't confrontational. I don't think he ever got into an argument or conflict with any of the guys on the team."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "It was a line of guys who were all different."

**RAY ALLISON:** "Everybody was so worried about Brian that you ended up getting a lot of the junk (rebound goals)."

**DAVE STEWART:** "Just a natural. Brian had that knack. He reminded me of (Ron) Chipperfield and those guys. He was just a natural goal scorer, and there aren't too many. He was a good guy. We had some fun."

**DON GILLEN:** "(Brian) was like a machine. He was just consistent every day. He was a good ball player, he was a good golfer. At the last reunion, he won the golf tournament. Every sport he did, he did it well. If he played

football, he would probably be the quarterback of the Blue Bombers. He was just a natural athlete, and his body was almost ideal. He wasn't overly stocky but he was strong."

**DAVE McDONALD:** "(Brian) was an unreal goal scorer and he wanted to win. I do remember one time we were playing in the playoffs and I scored a goal. He came by me and said 'Well, it's about time.' (laughs) I guess I hadn't scored in a while. It's a team game and everybody has to score, not just the one line. It's a team effort no matter what. He was very smart with the puck and he had a great shot, low corner, far side, he would put it there lots."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "I roomed with him and Allison. I was the rookie, I was 17 years old, and wherever we went I had to sleep on the floor because they would put ice in the bed or do whatever for the rookie to make it a little tougher. Brian was one of the best players with the puck. He knew how to put the puck in the net. He was a tough kid. He had the mentality that this was going to happen and he just did it. He scored a lot of goals and played a lot of minutes."

**BRUCE PENTON (Brandon Sun):** "(Brian) was very strong, a very good skater, and had a shot, he had those three things. He wasn't like Mike Bossy type scoring and he wasn't Eric Nest-erenko-type strong but he was up at the top of the list on every category, and he was a very good skater, he was strong on his skates, you couldn't knock him off. He would be getting checked from two sides and still hang onto the puck and get the shot away. I'm not surprised he went on to have a great career in the NHL because of those three attributes."

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BY GREGG DRINNAN

This story originally appeared in the Dec. 16, 1978 edition of the Brandon Sun.

By the end of this Western Hockey League season, Brandon Wheat Kings' Brian Propp — barring injury — will own every major offensive category in the circuit's record book.

And the most amazing about it is that Propp will have done it in just three seasons.

Going into Sunday night's game with Saskatoon Blades at the Keystone Centre, Propp is the league-leader in goals (45), and points (97). The 19-year-old left winger is in search of his second consecutive WHL scoring title and, if he continues his current pace, he will reach that goal easily.

Last year, Propp won the crown with 183 points, the second highest total in league history, behind Saskatoon's Bernie Federko, who skated to 187 points in 1975-76.

But, so far, there is no comparing Propp's performance last year, with his effort this campaign. A year ago, after 29 games, Propp had 74 points, on 22 goals and 52 assists. This time around, his goal production is up 23, to 45, while his assists' total is the same. His 97 points represent an increase of 23.

If Propp were to keep up his present pace (3.34 points-per-game), he would finish the season with 110 goals, 127 assists and 237 points — all of which would obviously be league records.

Former Wheat King Bill Derlago holds the WHL record for most goals in a season, thanks to a 96-goal effort in 1976-77. That season, after 29 games, he had just 34 goals. The record for most assists in a season (117) was set by Flin Flon Bombers' Bobby Clarke in 1967-68.

But, the most incredible part of the 'Brian Propp Saga' is the way the native of Neudorf, Sask., has been piling up the points. Ron Chipperfield, yet another ex-Wheat King, is the WHL all-time point-leader, with 470 in 252 games, for a per-game showing of 1.87 points. Propp, in 171 games, has accumulated 414 points. Get out the pocket calculator and that works out to an incredible 2.42 points every time Propp laces on the blades.

In comparison, only three players, all who have since moved on to the pro ranks, have averaged over two points-per-game in their careers — Steve Tambellini went at a 2.30 pace with Lethbridge Broncos, Derlago averaged 2.09 and Regina Pats' Dennis Sobchuk finished at 2.01.

When this season began Propp stood 19th on the WHL career point-scoring list. Already, he has moved up to fifth, with only Chipperfield (470), Derlago (437), Sobchuk (418), and former Wheat King Dale McMullin (418) ahead of him.

## ON THE ICE

### SEASON IN REVIEW

#### Brandon 9 Edmonton 5

Game 31, Dec. 14, 1978

**Recap:** Edmonton led 3-0 early in the second period when Brandon's offence finally exploded into action. The Wheat Kings fired 16 shots in the middle frame and scored six goals to lead 6-4 after 40 minutes. Brandon played without the McCrimmon brothers after an incident the previous night. Brad was suspended for two games, and was to join the New Westminster Bruins for the world junior tournament. Meanwhile, Kelly earned an eight-game suspension for leaving the bench and will sit until Jan. 15. Brandon defenceman Mike Perovich earned five assists in the win.

**BWK goals:** Boschman (2), Propp (2), Gillen (2), Allison, McDonald, Roberts.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 40-25 BWK.

**Attendance:** Estimated at 900, in Edmonton.

**Record:** 25-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We started the way we left off on Wednesday night. We got down 3-0 and wondered what the hell was going on. But, that third Edmonton goal got us fired up."

#### Brandon 5, Saskatoon 4

Game 32, Dec. 17, 1978

**Recap:** The Wheat Kings built a 5-1 lead and nearly saw it disappear as the Blades scored three times in a three-minute span late in the third period. Goalie Rick Knickle preserved the victory with a huge glove save after a draw in the Brandon end as Saskatoon players celebrated before they realized the netminder had the puck. It was Brandon's last game until Jan. 5, although some Wheat Kings were active at tournaments over the Christmas break.

**BWK goals:** Perovich, Boschman, Stewart, Kiessig, Propp.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 46-46.

**Attendance:** 2,089, in Brandon.

**Record:** 26-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We started sitting on the lead. I think the guys have just wanted to get the last few games over with. We've got guys going to Sweden, guys going to the Labatt Cup and guys going home for Christmas. They've had too many other things on their minds."

#### Brandon 6, Saskatoon 2

Game 33, Jan. 5, 1979

**Recap:** The Wheat Kings fell behind early in their first game in 19 days but Propp, who was held to a single goal at the world junior championship with the New Westminster Bruins over Christmas, scored twice and added an assist to boost his point total to 102. He also moved into third place in the WHL record book for career points with 419, trailing only a pair of former Wheat Kings — Ron Chipperfield (470) and Bill Derlago (437). Ray Allison's assist gave him 250 in his career, tying former Wheat King Dale McMullin for second in league history.

Brandon was without injured forwards Dave Chartier and Dave McDonald, plus Kelly McCrimmon, who served the third game of his eight-game suspension.

**BWK goals:** Propp (2), Boschman, Kempthorne, Allison, Kiessig.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 29-22 BWK.

**Attendance:** 3,024, in Saskatoon.

**Record:** 27-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "Actually we stumbled around quite a bit in the first period. For a while out there it was almost like we were strangers to each other."

#### Brandon 8, Regina 4

Game 34, Jan. 7, 1979

**Recap:** Brian Propp scored his 50th goal of the season in just his 34th game as Brandon took a 4-1 lead after the opening frame in beating Regina for the seventh straight time. Don Gillen wore a wire mask to protect the nose he broke in Saskatoon. Brandon had scored 251 goals and allowed 101, both league bests.

**BWK goals:** Propp (2), Roberts (2), Boschman, Brad McCrimmon, Stewart, Gusdal.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 70-38 BWK.

**Attendance:** 2,085, in Brandon.

**Record:** 28-1-5.

**Brian Propp:** (on Regina goalie Ken McNabb's 62 saves) "He was pretty lucky at times."

#### Brandon 8, Edmonton 4

Game 35, Jan. 9, 1979

**Recap:** Brian Propp scored 28 seconds into the second period to break a 2-2 tie, and Brandon scored twice more in the next seven minutes to break open a close game. Wes Coulson had two goals and two assists, and Dave Chartier scored in his return to the lineup after suffering a broken wrist on Dec. 5. With Laurie Boschman resting a sore shoulder, Chartier centred Propp and Ray Allison. Dave Stewart earned two assists despite playing with a sore shoulder, boosting him to 31 for the season, passing the total he earned in his rookie campaign.

**BWK goals:** Propp (3), Coulson (2), Roberts, Allison, Chartier.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 53-41 BWK.

**Attendance:** 2,113, in Brandon.

**Record:** 29-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "That's the best game Propp has played in a month. He was aggressive and he looked like he was hungry again. That's the way he's got to play ... he's got to want the puck."

#### Brandon 9, Regina 3

Game 36, Jan. 10, 1979

**Recap:** Brandon Travellers captain Lavern Popple, who was called up with Laurie Boschman (shoulder), Dave Stewart (shoulder), Dave McDonald (ankle), Don Gillen (broken nose)

and Kelly McCrimmon (suspension) out of the lineup, scored his first WHL goal with a second remaining in the middle frame. Brian Propp's three goals boosted his season total to 56, which includes nine game-winners.

**BWK goals:** Propp (3), Coulson (2), Patrick, Gusdal, Popple, Chartier.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 38-21 BWK.

**Attendance:** 3,000, in Regina.

**Record:** 30-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We got off to a hell of a start and the defence moved the puck well in the first period. Then we coasted a bit after the first period. If you can get a team like that down a goal or two early they sometimes give up a bit. We talked about that in the dressing room and then went out and did it."

#### Brandon 9, Lethbridge 2

Game 37, Jan. 13, 1979

**Recap:** Brad Kempthorne scored a WHL career-high four goals as the Wheat Kings blasted a Broncos team that had won 16 of its previous 20 games. Kempthorne had 13 goals in just 22 games after missing time due to a broken collarbone. Goalie Scott Olson made 32 saves in his first appearance since the Christmas break.

**BWK goals:** Kempthorne (4), Kiessig, Propp, Allison, Stewart, Chartier.

**BWK goalie:** Olson.

**Shots on net:** 56-36 BWK.

**Attendance:** 3,000, in Brandon.

**Record:** 31-1-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We got a super effort from Kempthorne. He was in command of himself. Sometimes he gets complacent but he worked harder than he had been and it showed."

#### Portland 3, Brandon 2

Game 38, Jan. 15, 1979

**Recap:** Brandon fell behind midway through the first period and received goals from Brian Propp and Brad Kempthorne in the middle frame to take the lead, but Jim Dobson scored twice for the Winter Hawks in the third period for the victory. The winner came with 3:23 remaining, but the victory was sealed with 21 seconds remaining when Portland goalie Bart Hunter made a sensational glove save on Brad McCrimmon. It was the Wheat Kings' first regular-season loss at home since a 7-5 defeat at the hands of the Seattle Breakers on Jan. 31, 1978, an incredible stretch of 36 games at the Keystone Centre. It was just the third time, including exhibition games, that Brandon was outshot.

**BWK goals:** Propp, Kempthorne.

**BWK goalie:** Olson.

**Shots on net:** 59-48 Port.

**Attendance:** 4,132, in Brandon.

**Record:** 31-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** (on Portland) "They were sure hungry. They were just like a bunch of dogs."