

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

# Gillen a great man to have in the lineup

BY PERRY BERGSON

Don Gillen started his career in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League at age 15, and after a sudden growth spurt, began to find his way in his new six-foot-three frame.

He put up 34 points in 60 games as a 17-year-old rookie in 1977-78, and started to blossom into an elite player a year later with 51 points and 212 penalty minutes in 64 games. The Dodsland, Sask. product, which is just down the road from Plenty, where the McCrimmon brothers grew up, scored one of the biggest goals of the season for the Wheat Kings in the 1979 league final when he converted on a breakaway in overtime in Game 5 to give the Wheat Kings a 3-2 series lead over the Portland Winter Hawks.

After the season, he was taken in the fourth round of the NHL draft, 77th overall by the Philadelphia Flyers in 1979.

Gillen returned to Brandon for his 19-year-old season in 1979-80, leading the team in scoring with 87 points and in penalty minutes with a remarkable 372.

He played 35 National Hockey League games, and was actually traded for his former Brandon teammate Ray Allison.

After a four-year pro career, Gillen got into the oil business and did well, and has also had a variety of other business ventures over the years. He lives in Saskatoon.

**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "Donny Gillen lived at our house for a year and is from Dodsland, Sask. He was a bit of a character. He was a big guy, a big sort of lumbering winger and I remember Donny had a good sense of humour. I remember he and I think it was Kelly McCrimmon getting into it at the back of the bus over what was the best kind of farm



Don Gillen scored 21 goals during the regular season and also sniped arguably the most important goal of the playoffs for the Wheat Kings. (Brandon Sun file photo)

machinery, John Deere or White. I think they almost came to blows. One was from Dodsland and one was from Plenty, so they were close to each other but they were fiercely loyal to their brand of farm equipment."

**KELLY McCRIMMON:** "Donny would debate you about anything. It didn't matter who you were or how old you were, he wanted to have a debate about something, whether it was farm land or anything. He was always thinking and always figuring things out. He's gone on to be incredibly successful."

**BRIAN PROPP:** "(Don) cracks me up. I saw him at Flyers alumni golf event that we had a couple of years ago. He was a big funny guy ... When it came to it, he was a pretty good fighter."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "Donny was a big guy. His skating was — obviously everybody has their deficiencies and assets — but Donny could shoot a puck and was a smart guy as far as the game would be played. He was very well liked."

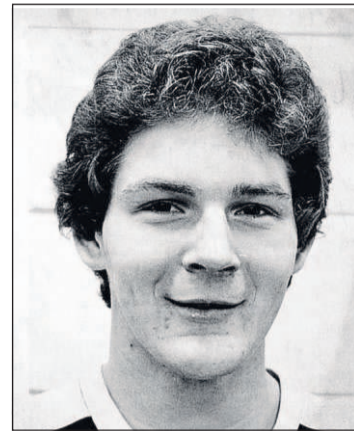
**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "(Don) had a great sense of humour, was strong as a horse, he was real funny but a real strong, tough farm boy with talent. He had real big hands for a big guy. He was good."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "People underestimated Donny Gillen and his abilities. He played the dumb role and the goofy role but was very, very well liked and another one of those guys who was a really good guy."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "Gilligan

was funny. He had a concussion one night. We were getting on the bus — I think we were playing Regina and he took a headshot, like we all did — and we asked him how many fingers. It was 'OK, he's all right, don't let him fall asleep on the bus.' So we were throwing s— at him all night on the bus going back to Brandon so he wouldn't fall asleep. He was funny."

**KELLY McCRIMMON:** "Don and I have been friends our whole lives and still are. He was so big and strong and one of the toughest guys in the league. He was a much better player for me than what he ever got credit for because the first thing you think about is how big and strong and tough he is. He was a smart player, he was a good player."



Don Gillen

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "I liked Donny because he was playing hockey and doing things but he was always talking about other things in life and what he was going to accomplish and what he was going to do. The funny thing is, over the years I've sold him a couple of vehicles, and he's done very well for himself in the oil business. He's made a lot, lost some and made a lot again. He was kind of a dreamer. When we were on the bus, he would always talk about what he was going to do, and it wasn't always about hockey. He was going to be a businessman and he was going to succeed at that, and he did. He was just a nice guy."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "Was Don a big horse, eh? Unbelievable guy. He was tough, he would fight. He was a grinder, a tough guy, he got in the road, hit a lot of guys, fought a lot of guys. One of the toughest kids around, but mind you, we beat up on a lot of kids back then. They knew who we were, but we weren't popular."

**RAY ALLISON:** "The biggest thing that stands about Don is the size of his head (laughs). He was the only guy I know we had to get special helmets for. Don was a good player too but I remember more his sense of hu-

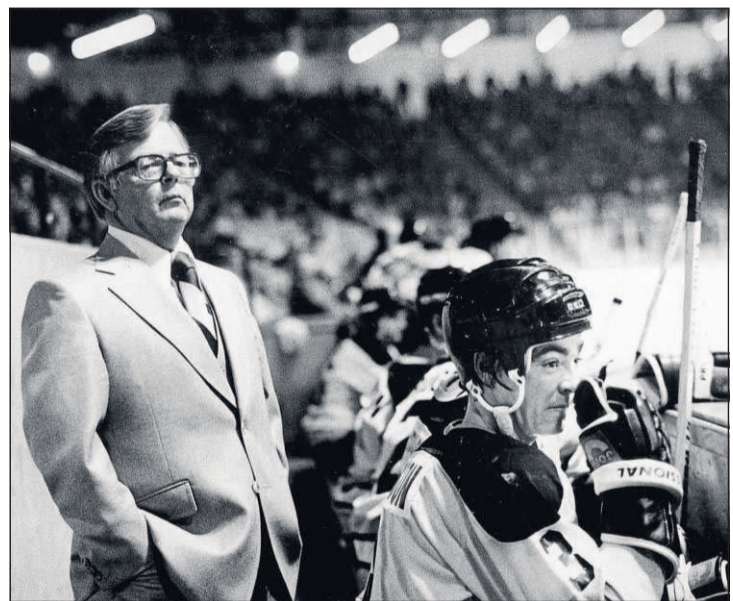
mour. Some of these guys were incredible but Don had an unbelievable sense of humour. He was always funny."

**DAVE STEWART:** "Donny was just a teddy bear. He was a good guy, more of a country guy. Back then, I was more of a city guy and Donny was a country guy. He was more into his farming and country music when a lot of us were into Led Zeppelin and whatever. Donny was about the only one who liked his country music back then, and that's unheard of when you're playing junior hockey. Dunc and us guys had to get him riled up because he was a big boy but he wasn't that aggressive at first. We had to teach him out to fight too and he took a few, but then Dunc and Rocky (Addison) got ahold of him and changed things around."

**WES COULSON:** "Don was another fun-loving guy but he was tough. He didn't back down from anybody. At one point when he first came to Brandon, it was a confidence thing for him. He lacked a bit of confidence and it took a while for him to break out of that, but once he did, he was a huge part of our team. The goal he scored in Game 5 in Portland is likely the biggest goal he ever scored in junior hockey. That put us ahead 3-2 going into Game 6."

**GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun):** "I remember Don Gillen's grin. He always had that grin on his face. It's a wonder he got into fights. I'm sure some guys fought him because he grinned at them in the corner. He could really shoot the puck. Brian Propp loved to score but I don't know if anyone had more fun in hockey and life at that age than Don Gillen did."

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Jack Brockest, shown behind the Brandon Wheat Kings bench with Dunc McCallum away, purchased the team during the 1978-79 season, news that was announced on Jan. 11, 1979. (Brandon Sun file photo)

## Brockest controls destiny of his Wheat Kings

BY GREGG DRINNAN

This story originally appeared in the Jan. 12, 1979 edition of the Brandon Sun.

The date was April 24, 1975 and Brandon Wheat Kings had just announced that Jack Brockest was their new general manager. "One thing important to me," Brockest said, at the time, "was an ... option to purchase part of the team." Well, Brockest has gone one better than that.

Bob Cornell, Wheat Kings' president and governor, announced Thursday that "Jack Brockest has purchased control of the hockey club."

Cornell continued: "A couple of owners expressed a desire to get out, and Jack expressed an interest in buying the hockey club. Now, Jack is the principal owner ... he bought out all the directors."

The deal is subject to ratification by the Western Hockey League's board of governors, and this likely will be forth-

coming at the league's semi-annual meeting which starts Wednesday in Vancouver.

The 50-year-old Brockest was one of eight directors, having bought his way in when Glenn Lawson got out a couple of years back. Other directors were Cornell, Stuart Craig, Clair Murray, Glen Fowler, Dave Laing, Ross Mitchell and Bruce Kent. This group of seven, plus Lawson, took control of the Wheat Kings during an organizational restructuring in 1974.

"The major shareholders and the 'B' shareholders put their money up a few years ago," said Cornell, "when the team was on shaky ground. The key to getting involved was that we wanted to keep junior hockey in Brandon. We stepped in in 1974 and now we feel it's a good solid organization ... and it should continue that way as far as we're concerned."

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## ON THE ICE

### SEASON IN REVIEW

**Brandon 8, Saskatoon 3  
Game 39, Jan. 17, 1979**

**Recap:** Brandon took an incredible 31-point lead in the Eastern Division with the win over second-place Saskatoon (14-18-10), and went six points up on the next best team in the league, the Central Division's Billings Bighorns (29-10-5). The game was played in front of only 1,681 fans, the lowest attendance in Brandon since March 10, 1976. Brian Propp had 120 points with his five-point performance. Three Wheat Kings, Don Dietrich, Don Gillen and Kelly McCrimmon, had fresh brush cuts after being dared to cut their hair by teammates.

**BWK goals:** Allison (2), Propp (2), Perovich (2), McDonald (2).

**BWK goalie:** Olson.  
**Shots on net:** 41-34 BWK.  
**Attendance:** 1,681, in Brandon.  
**Record:** 32-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We started slowly. A letdown after the Portland game could have had something to do with it. I'm still unhappy with some of the 19-year-olds. They should be trying their hardest every game and they aren't."

**Brandon 6, Regina 5  
Game 40, Jan. 19, 1979**

**Recap:** Regina took a 3-1 lead early in the second period but Steve Patrick responded 41 seconds later. When the Pats scored again, Mike Perovich and Brian Propp replied with a pair of power-play goals 19 seconds apart to make it 4-3. Trailing 5-4 in the third period, Brandon struck again, with Kelly McCrimmon and Brad Kempthorne sniping 69 seconds apart for the win. Brandon played without two-thirds of its top line, with Laurie Boschman resting a shoulder and Ray Allison nursing an ankle injury.

**BWK goals:** Chartier, Patrick, Perovich, Propp, Kelly McCrimmon, Kempthorne.  
**BWK goalie:** Olson.  
**Shots on net:** 47-32 Reg.  
**Attendance:** 1,701, in Regina.  
**Record:** 33-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "They played better than we have been. They were really hustling and they played aggressive. I think they took a look at the two guys we had out and figured they had a chance to win. They were fired up."

**Brandon 8, Regina 3  
Game 41, Jan. 21, 1979**

**Recap:** With Laurie Boschman and Ray Allison still out of the lineup, Brandon raced out to a 3-0 lead and there wasn't any looking back. Propp opened the scoring with his 62nd goal of the season, but after dealing with a bit too much physical abuse, finally cross-checked and fought Regina defenceman Dave Monson. In addition, after Brandon's Tim Lockridge and Regina's Kevin

Burns left the penalty box following their fighting majors, they didn't bring their gloves, intent on renewing hostilities. Linesman Bill Chapple got between them first, however, and both were given minor penalties. As soon as those penalties ended, they finally had the second bout. Lockridge was tossed out of the game, apparently to prevent Round 3.

**BWK goals:** Kiessig (2), Propp, Lockridge, Gussal, Coulson, Kempthorne, Patrick.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.  
**Shots on net:** 55-32 BWK.

**Attendance:** 1,822, in Brandon.  
**Record:** 34-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "We're playing a little more physical than we have been. And we will continue to do so. I believe that when you're physical you're in the game more. You've got to hit and be hit to really get into the swing of things. And one of our biggest breakdowns comes when our forwards aren't physical in our end — twice tonight that led to Regina goals."

**Brandon 3, Saskatoon 2  
Game 42, Jan. 23, 1979**

**Recap:** After falling behind 1-0 in the first, Brandon scored the next three goals in the victory. Laurie Boschman returned to the lineup and scored his 39th goal of the season early in the third period on the power play, and it stood up as the winner. Earlier, Dave Stewart hit a nice plateau when his 13th goal of the season lifted him to 50 points. Brandon nearly had a fourth goal twice, but Stewart and Brian Propp both hit posts with the Saskatoon goalie pulled. Brandon took 14 of the 21 minor penalties, with the teams evenly splitting 10 majors. It was the first game on a five-night road trip that would see Brandon play four times. Ray Allison did not make the trip as he rehabbed a pulled leg muscle.

**BWK goals:** Stewart, Propp, Boschman.  
**BWK goalie:** Knickle.

**Shots on net:** 31-28 BWK.  
**Attendance:** 3,284, in Saskatoon.  
**Record:** 35-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "I had the feeling all night that we were in control. But we were forced to kill a lot of penalties. In fact, I can't remember playing three lines in a row once all night. There was always a penalty in there somewhere."

**Brandon 5, Regina 1  
Game 43, Jan. 24, 1979**

**Recap:** Brian Propp scored the game's opening two goals midway through the second period, Dave Chartier added his 10th and 11th goals and defenceman Mike Perovich contributed his 11th of the season as the visitors built a 5-0 lead. The team headed to Edmonton to meet the Oil Kings the next night.

**BWK goals:** Propp (2), Chartier (2), Perovich.  
**BWK goalie:** Olson.  
**Shots on net:** 39-38 BWK.

**Attendance:** 1,640, in Regina.  
**Record:** 36-2-5.

**Dunc McCallum:** "I think we were a little overconfident. We got more serious in the second and third periods."

**Brandon 4, Edmonton 4  
Game 44, Jan. 25, 1979**

**Recap:** Edmonton tied the game 3-3 with goals 66 seconds apart midway through the third period. Laurie Boschman replied 71 seconds after the second goal to give Brandon a 4-3 lead, but the Oil Kings' Franco Disciglio tied it again with just over three minutes remaining. With the point it earned, Brandon had 78, exactly twice as many as second-place Saskatoon. The Wheat Kings would finish up the four-game road trip with another game in Edmonton on Jan. 27.

**BWK goals:** Patrick (2), Kempthorne, Boschman.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.  
**Shots on net:** 38-28 BWK.  
**Attendance:** 573, in Edmonton.  
**Record:** 36-2-6.

**Brandon 9, Edmonton 2  
Game 45, Jan. 27, 1979**

**Recap:** A day of rest apparently was exactly what the Wheat Kings needed. Steve Patrick, who was taking Ray Allison's spot on the top line, scored twice, as did Laurie Boschman. With his four-point night, Brian Propp led league scoring with 134 points.

**BWK goals:** Boschman (2), Patrick (2), Perovich, Propp, Brad McCrimmon, Stewart, McDonald.

**BWK goalie:** Olson.  
**Shots on net:** 46-30 BWK.  
**Attendance:** 800, in Edmonton.  
**Record:** 37-2-6.

**Brandon 5, Saskatoon 1  
Game 46, Jan. 31, 1979**

**Recap:** Ray Allison returned after missing six games to score his 37th goal of the season. Brandon's Laurie Boschman and Saskatoon's Ian Tennant had a pair of third-period scraps, and former Brandon trainer John Pozniak had to restrain Tennant from going after Boschman off the ice. Brian Propp was held off the scoresheet for just the second time all season, ending an 18-game point streak.

**BWK goals:** McDonald (2), Allison, Kiessig, Gillen.

**BWK goalie:** Knickle.  
**Shots on net:** 54-36 BWK.  
**Attendance:** 2,044, in Brandon.  
**Record:** 38-2-6.

**Rick Knickle:** "I felt good tonight. I should have had a shutout though. I thought I had him (Saskatoon goal scorer Dan Bent), but he shot before I thought he would. Even when it went through my legs I thought I had it because my stick was behind me. But it went underneath the stick."