

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

## Kiessig solid on the ice, in the room

BY PERRY BERGSON

Brant Kiessig wasn't playing organized hockey when he snuck onto the ice on a cold night when a bantam team was practising outside. He was invited to join them, promptly led the squad in scoring and became a junior prospect.

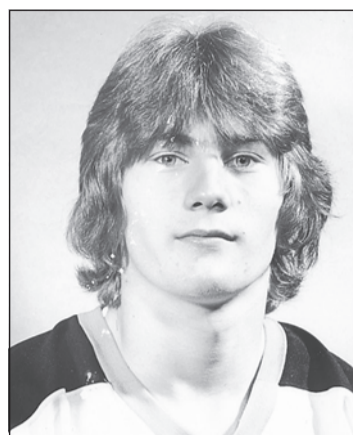
A natural talent, the Thunder Bay product was soon invited to camp with Brandon, and after a year with the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Brandon Travellers, graduated full time to the Wheat Kings in 1978-79.

The muscular 18-year-old responded to the opportunity by scoring 29 goals and providing an invaluable presence penalty killing.

He returned for the 1979-80 season, and was dealt to the Medicine Hat Tigers, where he scored 35 goals in 51 games.

After a short pro hockey career, he became a firefighter back home in Thunder Bay. He is now retired.

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "Brant was built like a brick—house to start with. He was square.



Brant Kiessig

He was just a strong guy. I think him and Gussy were buddies. He was happy to be there and just went with the flow. He was a real easy-going guy."

**GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun):** "There's not much doubt that he was the most chiselled player on that team, and that was before the gym was as popular as it is now. The gym certainly wasn't the place to hang out in the off-season in those days but he certainly did. I imagine he would have been the strongest guy on

that team, although Lockridge just on natural strength might have been right there ... He was another big, strong quiet type who was very effective ... Brant was great along the wall, a great penalty killer and if you gave him a regular shift, he was going to get you 20 goals."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "Brant had the big pipes on him. He was into music and played guitar. I know he was a fireman. They traded him the second year and I think he scored 40 goals with Medicine Hat. He and Gussy killed penalties in my first year and did a real good job. He was real strong but real quiet. He was a good hockey player."

**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "Brant was very solid in his build. He was an aggressive player, played a key role in that year for us and was a valuable part of that team."

**KELLY McCRIMMON:** "Brant was a really good player ... He was from Thunder Bay and that can't happen in this era because he would have been property of Ontario. He was really big and strong, a re-



Brant Kiessig became a terrific penalty killer while also scoring 29 goals for the Wheat Kings. (Brandon Sun file photo)

ally good skater, a really good two-way forward and an important guy."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "(Brant) was like Hercules. He was ripped ... He was a nice kid, quiet, unassuming."

**WES COULSON:** "(Brant) was a stocky built guy, a strong kid, and you kind of forget he scored 29 goals, which was an amazing feat for a guy who didn't get a lot of ice time. I don't remember him playing

big minutes but he contributed every time he got on the ice."

**DAVE STEWART:** "Kiesser didn't have a lot of stick-handling talent, he was more of a grinder too. He was one of those guys you wanted in front of the net all the time. He was a tough bugger too. He was underrated. He was almost like a bodybuilder when he came. You didn't see that very much back then."

**DON GILLEN:** "(Brant) was a very strong guy, a very good person. He was a gamer. He was there in the toughest of games."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "If you hit Brant, you were going to get hurt. I never saw a body so square. I don't know how he got it and how much he worked at it but he was a big strong kid, and obviously he was a big part ... He was a stud. He was a good player."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "There's a guy who was really deceiving on the ice when you watched Brant play because he looked stiff. But the guy could shoot the puck and was very valuable in big games with the third and fourth line assets he brings to a team. He was a pretty quiet guy ... but a really good guy. He was a tough nut too. Any time we had any brawls, his eyes lit up so we were 'OK, he likes this stuff.' He really didn't play that way. He was an honest player, he hit guys hard and was a really solid guy. He was another unsung guy."

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## Patrick's arrival a huge boon for team physical edge, scoring

BY PERRY BERGSON

It's hard to dispute that great genetics run in the Patrick family.

Brandon Wheat Kings forward Stephen Patrick — he prefers Stephen to Steve, as he is widely known by in the hockey world — was the son of Steve Patrick, the Glenella product who played 13 seasons with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, including four Grey Cup championship teams. Steve was later inducted into the Blue Bomber Hall of Fame, the Order of the Buffalo Hunt and the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame in 1998.

Stephen carved out his own path in professional sports, playing 250 National Hockey League games over six seasons with the Buffalo Sabres, New York Rangers and Quebec Nordiques.

And in perhaps the ultimate future considerations, his son Nolan joined the Wheat Kings 25 years after Stephen left and the third generation talent blossomed into a Western Hockey League star.

Patrick wasn't initially sure he wanted to play in the WHL, instead staying with the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's St. James Canadians with the intention of going to college. He played a game with the Wheat Kings on Nov. 11, went home and skated with the Canadians again, and ultimately joined Brandon for good on Nov. 22.

Nicknamed "Archie" by his teammates, he settled in with Dave Stewart and Dave McDonald on the second line, contributing 23 goals and 31 assists in 52 games to finish seventh in team scoring.

Patrick added 18 more points in 22 playoff games.

He spent two more seasons with Brandon before turning pro, and retired from hockey after the 1985-86 season.

The Patricks are the only father-son duo in Wheat Kings history to both win a WHL championship with a franchise that earned the top prize in 1979, 1996 and 2016.

He now owns his own company, Patrick Realty, in Winnipeg.

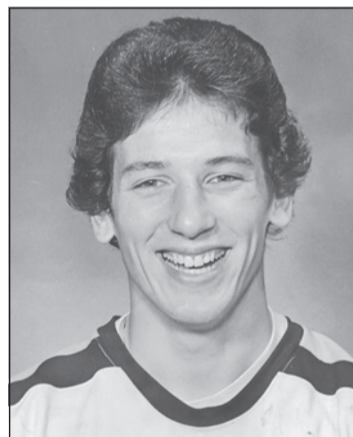
**RICK KNICKLE:** "What a talent. He was a guy who hit like a football player. His dad was football player. Stephen was one of those guys who was really quirky but in a good way. He was a guy who really didn't know his own strength and his own talent."

**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "Stephen was a great junior player. He played on the right side and I think he might have played a little bit of centre after we left. He was a big, strong guy, good skater, could really do it all."

**WES COULSON:** "Stephen was another big guy with good skill level who could skate and shoot. He was one of those guys who at the age, he played a role and played it very well



Stephen Patrick joined the Brandon Wheat Kings later in the season but showed an immediate ability to score in the Western Hockey League. (Brandon Sun file photo)



Stephen Patrick

and scored some goals and wasn't afraid to bang guys around. He had quite a bit of skill."

**BRIAN PROPP:** "Stephen was another big strong guy who had a right-handed shot and fit in with the younger guys. He was a good forward, and good hard, heads-up guy. He got a chance with Dunc to play a little bit more. We could have scored more goals but we didn't need to. We let the younger guys have a chance to improve themselves too, and that's why Dunc was such a good coach. He let people know what they have and that they had to work for everything. You don't have to get crazy, just practise hard and find a way."

**GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun):** "Stephen was a big kid. He played that one game to prove he could play in the league if he wanted to. He went back to the St. James Canadians, but it wasn't long until he came back. He was one of the final pieces they needed, him and Dave McDonald and Kelly Elcombe. Every time I see Nolan I think of Stephen because they have the same skating style. The first time I saw Nolan it blew me away ... At that time, Stephen was a bit of a plodder but had really good hands for a big guy. He was kind of shy. Certainly in his early days with the Wheat Kings, I think it came a little fast to him so it was like his head was in the clouds for a little bit until he got comfortable."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "Stephen

was part of the posse, the Winnipeg guys with Dave McDonald and Kelly Elcombe. They came a little bit later in the season. He was another guy who I gravitated to. There were about five or six of us with Dave Stewart and Kelly McCrimmon and Donny Dietrich. We didn't have cliques ... We just had certain guys who were the same age or had girlfriends of girlfriends ... Steve was a good guy and a good player."

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "Steve was a good guy. He was just a big strong guy and he made a difference. He was on the second line with Stewie most of the time. He was just a good hockey player. He was so athletic, he was six-foot-three and could skate like the wind."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "(Stephen) was big and strong. He was always bigger than everybody else."

**KELLY McCRIMMON:** "Stephen joined us late and it was a real recruiting coup for us. He was so talented, a physical specimen, big and strong, a great skater."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "(Stephen) was a serious kid. You could tell he was going to go somewhere. He was younger than us so I didn't get to know him much off the ice. He had a good work ethic."

**RAY ALLISON:** "Steve was a big guy, a big right-handed shot. He was a good player."

**DAVE STEWART:** "Stephen was a scorer in junior. He was a big boy too. I enjoyed Steven on my wing. I had Steven and Dave on my wings and they both had good size. We gelled pretty good. Stephen is a little bit of a character too. We were always throwing shots and Stephen was always in there. He liked to start the shots with him and Dave (McDonald) and Kelly Elcombe, the Winnipeg boys. It was good fun."

**DON GILLEN:** "(Stephen) was a good guy with a good attitude as far as a friendly guy. He was a very good athlete ... He was a heck of a strong skater, good shot, he had all the aspects."

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BY PERRY BERGSON

Dave McDonald was one of the three unexpected gifts that fell into the lap of the Brandon Wheat Kings during the 1978-79 season.

McDonald wasn't getting along with the coach at the University of Minnesota Duluth so the Winnipegger left the college team to join the Wheat Kings, who had acquired his rights in a trade a year earlier. His first game with the WHL club was on Nov. 9, 1978.

He was soon joined by his St. James Canadians teammates Stephen Patrick and Kelly Elcombe, giving Brandon an important infusion of talent. Like Patrick, whose dad Steve played in the Canadian football League, McDonald was the son of a professional athlete.

In fact, he was nicknamed Abby after his father Ab, who played 762 NHL games in 15 seasons and retired after two years in the World Hockey Association as captain of his hometown Winnipeg Jets.

McDonald put up 39 points (19 goals and 20 assists) with the Wheat Kings in 1978-79, and surely would have become their 10th 20-goal scorer if he had played more than 43 games. Still, he was drafted in the sixth round, 123rd overall, by the Hartford Whalers in 1979.

He returned to the Wheat Kings for the 1979-80 season, scoring 32 goals, before embarking on a three-year pro career. McDonald now lives in Minnedosa.

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "Abby left Minnesota Duluth and went to Brandon in October. I left the Canadians — I was playing for the St. James Canadians and was going to play out my Grade 12 and go on a scholarship — and then I left so I got there at the end of October. Then Kelly Elcombe — the three of us were all real good friends in Winnipeg — Kelly left Wisconsin a few weeks later and ended up in Brandon. So we all got initiated at the same time."

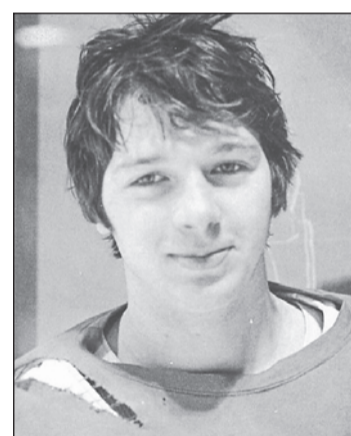
**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "Dave was a character, maybe like his father was. He was a solid left winger, left-handed shot, very tenacious on the puck."

**GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun):** "McDonald wasn't humongously big but he was big by the standards of those days. He was thick and could handle himself, and won a lot of one-on-one puck battles. He had a lot of grit. As time went on, those guys really got comfortable and liked to go to war for one another and stand up for one another, and he was certainly one who didn't mind the heavy going."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "Dave was another guy who hung around with me and Steve and Kelly (Elcombe). He was salt of the earth. Abby was a guy that



Dave McDonald provided a combination of skill and grit when he left college to join the Wheat Kings. (Brandon Sun file photo)



Dave McDonald

guys liked to bug, and was just a good guy. Everyone asks who was the best guy on the team, and it was Dave McDonald ... He was another tough guy, and like Donny Dietrich, his ability on the ice was his hockey sense and hands and knowing how to play the game growing up in a hockey family with his dad."

**DAVE STEWART:** "Abby is one of my best buddies ... He's a good guy, down to earth. He wouldn't say anything bad about anybody. He was one of those guys who would give you the shirt off his back. He liked to jab you too."

**DON GILLEN:** "(Dave) was a good guy. In hindsight, he had a lot of pressure on him from the shadow of his dad, Ab McDonald. He may not agree with that, but when he focused, he was very good and strong enough and tough enough. He was like a lot of us, he didn't always focus to his ability. Sometimes we allowed ourselves distractions, and that's part of being a junior hockey player."

**KELLY McCRIMMON:** "His dad Ab McDonald was just one of the all-time great guys around the game of hockey, and just a tremendous ambassador for the Jets and hockey in general after he was done his career. Dave McDonald was his son. He was just identical. He was a great guy, funny, loved to laugh, a good play-

er. I met Dave's parents many times and he was a chip off the block."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "Abby had a good shot and was really good positionally ... Abby was always happy. He got pissed off one time against Regina — I've forgotten the guy's name — knocked his front teeth out. Abby waited until the next game and beat the crap out of him. Abby was strong and he was tough. He had a lot of pride in playing for the Wheat Kings."

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "(Dave) was a little bit of a s— disturber. I remember that. He wasn't afraid to mix it up with anybody. I don't know what it was in that whole group, but he was another very easy-going guy who you couldn't rattle. I've run into him and had a beer with him a couple of times in the last couple of years, and I don't think he's changed. He's the same I remember when he was 19 years old."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "Abby was funny. He had a good sense of humour and was not a bad hockey player. He was always laughing. Abby was a good guy."

**WES COULSON:** "We used to call him Abby because of his dad, Ab McDonald. He was another guy who was fun loving and just loved life. You take a look at him and you wouldn't think he had a mean streak, but I tell you what, he could throw the dukes too and didn't really care. He was just happy to be there and play."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "Abby was just like his dad. What a gentleman. I've seen him a few times and he's always had the smile on his face. He was a good player too. What he didn't have in talent, he had in heart. We had a big team back then and he was one of the bigger ones so it made all of us young guys even stronger because our big guys were strong. He was a good guy."

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