

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

Inventive Olson seen as typical quirky goalie

BY PERRY BERGSON

Scott Olson was the dreamer in the Brandon Wheat Kings net who proved to have an innovative touch off the ice too.

The Minnesota product, the lone American on a squad of Canadian kids, shared the time in net with Rick Knickle during the regular season but saw less action in the play-offs. When Brandon picked up Portland goalie Bart Hunter for the Memorial Cup, Olson didn't play a minute.

He split the 1979-80 season between Brandon and the International Hockey League's Dayton Gems, but that's the last time he shows up in on-line hockey records.

Olson founded Rollerblade Inc. in 1983. He and his brother Brennan sold the company to Bob Naegele Jr., who is widely credited with starting the inline skating craze of the 1980s and 1990s and went on to own the Minnesota Wild.

Olson, who didn't respond to repeated requests to be part of this series, lives in Minnesota, where he continues to invent new products.

Laurie Boschman still owns one of Olson's rollerblade prototypes. He said Olson used to go to rinks and get young hockey players to try them, and sold them that way.

LAURIE BOSCHMAN: "When he came up from Minnesota, I remember his accent. His part-time gig was he did taxidermy during the season. He was a real entrepreneur, a real different kind of guy in the sense that he was very eclectic and certainly fit the mould of a goalie. I remember Scotty talking about this rollerblade, because of course he was the



Scott Olson, a Minnesota product, was the only non-Canadian on Brandon's roster. (Brandon Sun file photo)

inventor of the rollerblade ... He went on to invent several other things in the Twin Cities area but nothing had the success that the rollerblade did. He was first on the market."

RICK KNICKLE: "I really liked Scotty Olson, my goaltending partner, but I never really hung around with him ... Scotty was a really good partner to play with. It was my second year but we played together a little bit with the Travellers when he came late. Andy Murray knew him from North Dakota and brought him up and he pushed me. I could see that right away. He worked really hard off the ice and worked at his craft."

STEPHEN PATRICK: "Scotty Olson took me to the thrift shop in Brandon to buy clothes one time. When we were at Brad McCrimmon's wedding, it was in this Ukrainian church with hardwood floors, and you heard this

noise "punka punka punka, punka" and you look around and here comes Scott Olson wearing rollerblades. He lent me his car to go to Winnipeg to see my girlfriend one time and it had no back window. It was just plastic wrap, and it was three-on-the-tree (transmission) with the worst tires ever but he was the only guy I could borrow the car from. I put it into a snowdrift in a Winnipeg parking lot and it took me a day to get it out. Unique guy but a great guy. He had a Walkman, the first Walkman anybody had ever seen, on the bus one time."

TIM LOCKRIDGE: "He was the American who came in and he was just a different guy. I remember at the end of practice one day he wanted to deflect shots with his mask. Brian Propp and Ray Allison just kind of looked and smiled 'Sure Scott, we'll do that.' And they proceeded. The poor guy

stood there and took it. He had a hockey helmet with the cage on it and I'm sure they broke it but he was going out of his way to hit the pucks and Propper and those guys were just drilling it as hard as they could, but that's the type of guy he was. He just didn't care. He was another guy who was a dreamer ... He definitely thought outside the box."

MIKE PEROVICH: "(Scott) was off the wall, that guy. He was always going to make a buck and be a millionaire. He invented rollerblades so I guess he got some money out of it ... He was funny. He was a Bruce Springsteen fan so we had something in common there."

DAVE STEWART: "Scotty was a little off the wall."

DON GILLEN: "(Scott) was capable of playing very, very well, and he had some off nights, like everybody else. He was a reader, a student, was probably in some aspects a lot more mature than some of us, whether that was where he came from, I don't know. I knew he would do well in life. He was a thinker."

RICK KNICKLE: "We started the second year together and we almost split the games, because he deserved it. He played just as well as I did that year, but in the playoffs I played seven or eight games more because in the playoffs you kind of run with a guy a little bit. He was a quirky guy. I roomed with him, and he was doing this pushups against the wall and loved his skipping and invented the rollerblades. He was a quirky American but I liked Scotty a lot."

STEPHEN PATRICK: "Donny (Gillen) took a high hard



Scott Olson

one at Scotty, so Scotty ran out of the crease and jumped him. Donny couldn't get up because he kept slipping on his stick. He stepped on his stick and then stepped on Olly's stick. Olly was throwing punches and wrestling him to the ground, and Donny was going 'I slipped on the stick' and Olly was going 'Bulls—, I beat the crap out of you.'" (laughs)

DAVE CHARTIER: "(Scott) was a good guy. We talked quite a bit back in the day. He said 'I'm going to invent rollerblades. Do you want to get in?' ... Scott was a down-to-earth goaltender, very personable, just happy."

RAY ALLISON: "Scotty was part of that comic relief ... He was a great practice goalie. He would stay in the net forever and you could shoot on him forever. He would take a thousand shots."

GREGG DRINNAN (Brandon Sun): "Scotty Olson was just a free-spirited American. He was a perfect backup. Yes, he wanted to be the number one guy but he understood that wasn't going to happen

unless Rick got hurt. I think Scotty knew he had to be content with his playing time, and was quite content. There might have even been a part of him that didn't want the pressure of being the number one guy with that team. The thing I remember about him is inline skates. He was the first person I ever saw with rollerblades."

WES COULSON: "Scott came from the States. He was a typical goaltender. I think they're all the same, they're all nuts to play that. He was a good goaltender too. He kept to himself a fair bit, he wasn't one to go out much with the guys. He was about 15 years ahead of where training was headed. He was in top physical condition that guy. I can remember him running stairs after practice and putting the rollerblades on and going around the top of the Keystone Centre. We were like 'What the hell is this guy doing?' He was big into eating properly, not like Freddy and Stewy and I going to DK's Deep Fried Chicken House and having six pieces of chicken (laughs). He was ahead of the curve."

GREGG DRINNAN: "He took some goaltender skates, the big old clunky ones they used to wear, and they had taken the blades off and put rollerblades on. I can remember him on the concourse at the Keystone Centre doing laps. There was nothing streamlined about those goalie skates. They were big clunkers. I often wondered if whoever cleaned the floors at the Keystone Centre wondered where the rubber marks were coming from."

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Rick Knickle-Scott Olson: The puck stops here

BY GREGG DRINNAN

This story originally appeared in the Dec. 11, 1979 edition of the Brandon Sun.

As the unbeaten Brandon Wheat Kings continue to roll relentlessly along much has been said and written about the big guns — the Brian Propps, the Ray Allisons, the Laurie Boschmans, the Brad McCrimmons; even the Dave McDonalds and the Steve Patricks.

Escaping the glare of the spotlight, for the most part, has been the goaltending duo of Rick Knickle and Scott Olson and this tandem is as responsible as anyone for the Western Hockey League team's 1978-79 record 29-game regular-season unbeaten string. As a matter of fact, Knickle and Olson have played a huge role in Wheat Kings' overall regular-season undefeated streak of 49 games, which is also a WHL standard.

In this era of offence-oriented junior hockey it's uncommon — make that rare — for a major junior team to allow the opposition less than three goals per game. But, that's exactly what the firm of Knickle and Olson is doing.

Wheat Kings' opposition is scoring only an average of 2.65 goals per game, and that's simply incredible. Knickle presently leads all WHL goaltenders with a remarkable goals-against average of 2.39, while Olson is second with a highly-respectable mark of 2.94.

But, while the two goaltenders' statistics may be a lot alike, that's where the similarities end. It's extremely doubtful if any hockey team, ever, has employed two goaltenders as different, both in backgrounds and personalities, as the Brandon pair.

Knickle, at 18 years of age, came to Brandon from his native Nova Scotia, where his father, a member of the Air Force, is stationed. The 19-year-old Olson, originally from Bloomington, Minn., joined Wheat Kings out of University of North Dakota. As quiet and unassuming as Knickle is, Olson is just the opposite, gregarious, outgoing and, perhaps, a bit hyper.

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Knickle and Brandon defenceman Tim Lockridge have been friends since their boyhood days in Greenwood, N.S., a quiet community in the



LEFT: Scott Olson was considered quirky by his teammates but invented rollerblades, a product he used to test on the concourse at the Keystone Centre. (Brandon Sun file photo)

RIGHT: Rick Knickle followed his friend Tim Lockridge out to Brandon from Nova Scotia and spent three years with the club. (Brandon Sun file photo)

Annapolis Valley. When Lockridge headed west in hopes of furthering his hockey career, the two kept in touch and when Wheat Kings lost goaltender Glen Hanlon through graduation, Lockridge suggested to Knickle that perhaps he, too, should go west in search of fame and fortune.

"I've followed junior hockey closely for a long time," said Knickle, an avid sports fan who reads The Hockey News from cover to cover and is considered by his teammates to be quite a hockey trivia expert. "And I figured there were a lot of guys getting drafted out of this league so it must be something. I definitely want to be a pro, and I figured if I stayed home it would never happen."

So, with one year of Tier II junior behind him — he played goal for Scotia Colts — Knickle worked hard to get into the best condition of

his life, showed up at Wheat Kings' rookie camp and found himself assigned to the Manitoba Junior League Travellers.

It wasn't too much later that he got a call from Wheat Kings' coach Dunc McCallum and he found himself starting a game in, of all places, New Westminster. Incredible as it may sound, he was superb — kicking out 44 shots and being named the game's first star — and Wheat Kings emerged 5-4 winners over the Bruins, who would go on to win the Memorial Cup. Before the season had ended Knickle had appeared in 46 games, posting a league-leading 34 wins and seven ties. His goals-against average of 3.89 was second-best in the league, to Portland Winter Hawks Bart Hunter, at 3.88. And after this season, Knickle will be back for one more go-round with Wheat Kings before he's eligible for

pro hockey's junior draft.

Despite the glorious statistics, Knickle's feet still are planted firmly on the ground and he knows there's room for improvement in his game. He says his weakest areas are his feet (they lack quickness) and his stick checking.

"Most goalies are weak in their feet," Knickle explains, "and I'm working on that. I also need to improve my poke-checking. Scotty (Olson) is a good poke-checker and I'm trying to learn from watching him."

He's also learning from McCallum, a former professional defenceman in both the National Hockey League and the World Association, and Hanlon, who has spent time in training camp working with the goaltenders.

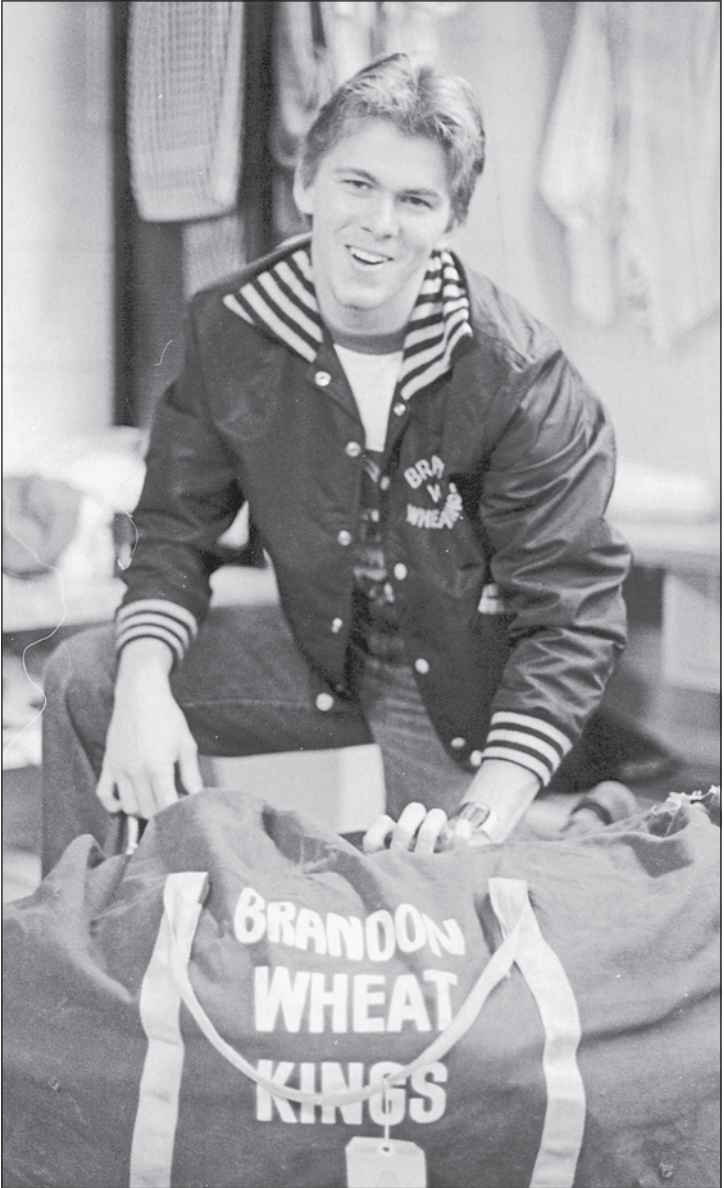
"With most coaches I've had," Knickle says, "the goalies are forgotten. But, not with

Dunc. He has taught me quite a bit, particularly about covering angles. I think I know quite a bit about goaltending, but Dunc really seems to know what he's talking about."

While Knickle obviously is a goaltender, and a damn good one, when he's on the ice, things are a bit different in the dressing room.

"Some people say I'm everything a goaltender isn't supposed to be," said Knickle. "I hardly ever get nervous before a game. I just sit there before a game ... that's how I psych myself up. When I get up against a team with a bit of scoring power — like Saskatoon at home, or maybe Portland — I get a bit of a tingle in my stomach."

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Nerves, not lack of same, supposedly go hand-in-hand with goal tenders. But, Olson claims he, like Knickle, is not



the nervous type.

"I'm not at all nervous," Olson says. "In fact, I sometimes wish I could get a bit nervous before a game."

Born in Grand Rapids, Minn., where he played a lot of his minor hockey, Olson now calls Bloomington, Minn., home. It was while he was living in Grand Rapids that he became a member of the goaltender's union.

"I've always been a goaltender," Olson recalled. "I got stuck there when I was younger. I had a coach who had been a goaltender and I guess he saw some potential."

Olson went from minor hockey in Grand Rapids to the high school ranks in Bloomington, where he suited up for Bloomington-Kennedy. After that it was off to the University of North Dakota.

"I was doing well at UND," Olson said. "I had to beat out 16 other goalies for one spot and I did it. But, they discovered my high school marks weren't high enough so I would have had to sit out a year before I could play."

Brandonite Paul Murray, then a student at UND and a member of the hockey team, suggested Olson try and catch a spot with the Wheat Kings.

Olson, who says "I hadn't really heard much about any Canadian teams," took that as sound advice and came north, where he ended up getting in six games with Wheat Kings, while spending most of his time with the Travellers.

Like Knickle, Olson says he has improved quite a bit under McCallum's tutelage.

"Dunc's all right," says Olson. "For sure I enjoy playing for him. Just the other night he gave me a few comments that will help me."

McCallum and Olson agree that perhaps his largest shortcoming, if you want to call it that, is in the area of concentration. And, that's something that is receiving a lot of attention.

"Scott has to try and concentrate more on angles than on moving," McCallum says, adding that there has been considerable improvement over the past year.

At 19 years of age, Olson will be eligible for the NHL and WHA junior drafts next spring. He admits he wouldn't mind turning pro and says "I think about turning pro once in a while, but try not to.

"If it happens, it happens."