

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



Brandon Wheat Kings fans honour the team at Brandon City Hall after they returned home from the Memorial Cup in 1979. (Brandon Sun file photo)

# Players look fondly at magic season now

BY PERRY BERGSON

All these years later, the 1978-79 Brandon Wheat Kings remain a measuring stick of greatness.

Brandon (58-5-9) still holds the WHL mark for most points with 125, and an incredible 49-game unbeaten streak that ran from Feb. 11, 1978 to Dec. 13, 1978.

The closest anyone has come to the points record was in 2008-09 when the Calgary Hitmen went 59-9-3-1 for 122 points, but it's worth noting the league had overtimes and shootouts by then.

In 2004, the Ontario Hockey League's London Knights started the season with a 31-game unbeaten streak, topping Brandon's 29-game mark by two. The Wheat Kings still hold the WHL mark for longest streak to start a season and longest streak overall.

Brandon's record of just five losses is five better than the 1976-77 Wheat Kings and the 1978-79 Portland Winterhawks.

Brandon's mark of two losses at home is tied for second behind the 1973-74 New Westminster Bruins, who were unbeaten. The Wheat Kings' 17-game unbeaten streak on the road was broken in 1999-2000 by the Hitmen, who went 18 games without a loss. The Wheat Kings still hold the mark for fewest road losses with three.

The team's 491 goals is third all time behind the 1986-87 Kamloops Blazers (496) and 1982-83 Winter Hawks (495).

The 85 shots they put on net against the Regina Pats on March 12, 1979 in a 14-4 win remains a league high.

Brian Propp set the record for goals (94) and points (194) for a left winger that season — he set the assists record the year before with 112 — and his 194 points is third in WHL history. His 13 hat tricks tied Bill Derlago's record, which was eclipsed in the 1983-84 season when Ray Ferraro scored 15. Propp's 16 game-winning goals remains the record.

"We were never out of a game," Kelly McCrimmon said. "Even during that long winning streak, we had some games where maybe we didn't play well but Ray and Laurie and Brian could win the game in a five-minute stretch in the third period. They were so good and our power play was so good."

The two goals Brandon scored six seconds apart on April 24, 1979 in a 13-3 win over the Lethbridge Broncos remain the two quickest markers in WHL playoff history.

The magic season remains a part of Wheat Kings lore, even in the dressing room that has been newly redone by owner Jared Jacobson.

A single square of the original brick remains untouched, where Brian Propp wrote "125 pts, try to beat that!" The ink is fading, especially on the bottom line, but the 125 is still easy to make out.

It's a number, and a season, that remains remarkably meaningful to the men, now in their sixties, who earned a place in history as teenagers. The memories will last well beyond the marks on the wall.

**RICK KNICKLE:** "It's something that I'm very proud of. Not winning doesn't hurt as much because of the length of the sample size, playing two years, three years with a lot of those guys and the friendships. Sports is the winning and the losing, but it's the process and things that you go through. Thank God I was in that time and that era because I don't think guys have as much fun as we did with that team."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "The record is special but the people were more special that you got to play with. Whether we went to overtime against Peterborough — we had the better team — or if we didn't get by Portland ... for me it was the bus trips, hanging out with the guys, the Roll-N-Pin, pizza after the game, Dieter doing the dance from Greased Lightning, all these many, many memories. It was fantastic we had that record, but you can have a record and not have a real memorable time because the wrong people were there. Everybody on the team brought something, whether you were fourth line or 5-6 D."

**RAY ALLISON:** "I don't look back too much. I reflect on it with fondness, it was a fun time in my life but if you're always looking back, you never look forward. You can't live your life that way and you shouldn't live your life that way. You have to look forward or it's not healthy. It was an exceptional time in my life and I would love to go back and do it again but I don't sit here and look back at it and try and recapture it every day because it's gone."

**KELLY MCCRIMMON:** "When you look at Brad and Laurie Boschman, Ray Allison, Brian Propp, those guys were so good. They were such great players that even as a player, you were just sometimes in awe of how good they were. That's something you ordinarily realize five years later or 10 years later, but even when it was happening, you marvelled at how good those players were. It was a great team, the (points) record still hasn't been broken. I would think every single person would feel a sense of pride there. There were some great friendships that lasted a lifetime from that group."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "You

remember the games, but you remember stuff away from the rink as much as you do the games because you're a wide-eyed kid, whether it was Olly fighting Donny or Olly coming into Brad's wedding wearing rollerblades or Dieter doing the dance, stuff like that."

**DAVE CHARTIER:** "It's big. There was a team from Ontario that beat our record a bit — they had a pretty special team too — and they were comparing us to them. It's unbelievable how after (40) years you still have records in the book and nobody has touched them. That's unreal."

**TIM LOCKRIDGE:** "It means a lot and I'm proud that I was able to be part of that. I didn't really start thinking about it until the year that London beat our record for consecutive unbeaten games. You know what, that was something to be proud of. Look how long it took somebody else to better what we accomplished."

**WES COULSON:** "Just the other day, I was out golfing and the guy asked 'What did you do in a previous life?' I

started talking to him about it and I said 'And I had the privilege of playing on one of the best junior hockey teams ever, the 1978-79 edition of the Brandon Wheat Kings.' He goes 'I didn't know about that.' He was a younger guy. I said 'Ya, we went 58-5-9.' He said 'You went what?' 'We went 58-5-9, we won 58 out of 72 games and we had 125 points out of a possible 144.' He goes 'Wow, you guys must have been unbelievable and I said 'To be there and be with the team we had, it was an absolute pleasure to say that I did that and was part of that.' There's really nothing else I can say. I have some lifetime friends out of it, lots of guys I haven't seen in a while and lots of guys I see now and again. I talk to guys once in a while but to be part of that was special. You don't realize it at the time because you're a kid but as you get older, you say 'Wow, we were pretty damn good.' It was just an honour and a privilege."

**DAVE McDONALD:** "It's great memories and great laughs. We would have team parties just like everybody

else would, which was all part of bonding together as a team. You play together and you have a few beers together. I love talking about that when somebody asks me about those players and that team. I love talking about it because it was a pretty special time to play on that team and with those guys."

**DAVE STEWART:** "A couple of years ago when P.A. weren't losing at all, I was going 'Oh no, this can't happen.' Then they finally lost and it was 'Oh yes, thank God,' as bad as that maybe sounds. That's our record. I'll never forget it. I have to be reminded sometimes, but I'll never forget, and I don't think the other guys will either. That's what keeps us together."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "I look back at it and realize that was quite a feat, the year we had. That was something else, and for somebody to break that, all records get broken but it lasted a long time."

**RICK KNICKLE:** "It was one team I've always cherished. You have so much more fun in junior than pro. The team was pretty special."

**STEPHEN PATRICK:** "In 2012 or 2014, Donny and Kelly and me went for lunch and you don't forget anything. You laugh like you're still in the dressing room ... Everything was great about Brandon. The year was great. We had great billets, great teammates, great coach, great GM. It was huge."

**MIKE PEROVICH:** "We were the best team that never won the Memorial Cup. That's something, and you're proud to be part of it."

**LAURIE BOSCHMAN:** "At the time, you're just playing hockey. We love what we do, we love competing, we love going to battle and we just enjoyed each other's company. It's always better when you're on a winning team, and the years I was in Brandon, we had good teams ... You look back years later, and I think when the London Knights were after that record of ours and they broke it, the media started reaching out to those of us who played on that Brandon team."

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### DEAR WHEAT KING FANS,

As we get closer to the 2021/2022 hockey season, I wanted to personally take this time to thank you for your patience over the last 18-months. Our players and staff are extremely excited to welcome you back to the arena for the first time since March 7th of 2020.

The 2021 season was a unique experience for our players and staff. We played 24 games under one roof while you watched at home from the comfort of your living room. Our team not only played hard for the logo on their chest but the communities our fans live in. Through hard work and commitment to the plan we clinched the East Division title. This new banner will be proudly hung from the rafters this October, a memento from a truly "one of a kind" season.

Our attention now shifts to a new era and a new season. The focus is not only on continuing traditions you've come to expect, but to provide the best entertainment in the WHL.

In co-operation with the Keystone Centre management, we have made several capital improvements to the arena, including new boards and glass, sound system enhancements, creative lighting as well as many other décor and cosmetic upgrades. Our staff has implemented a new digital ticketing platform to make your entry into our venue as simple and safe as possible. Fans can expect a brand new in-game experience from the moment the doors open until the final buzzer.

On the ice, we return a core nucleus of players including Ottawa Senators draft pick Ridly Greig, Edmonton Oilers pick Jake Chiasson and Washington Capitals selection Vinny Iorio. Meanwhile, Nate Danielson, Rylan Roersma, and Ty Zimmer make up the next wave of talent from our 2019 WHL bantam draft class.

In closing, on behalf of the new ownership we want to thank you for your continued patience and support of the Wheat Kings. Our players are extremely proud to play in front of you and can't wait to feel the energy in our building. We look forward to seeing you!

WITH GRATITUDE,

VIONELL (JARED) JACOBSON  
OWNER & GOVERNOR  
BRANDON WHEAT KINGS

