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## Learning the Game

Heading into sudden-death overtime in game seven of the 1983 Adams Division final, 34-year-old Brad Park felt this was it: his last chance in the playoffs, his last chance to finally get his name on the elusive Stanley Cup. A win against the Buffalo Sabres would advance his Boston Bruins to the semifinals against the defending Stanley Cup champion New York Islanders, with the winner of that series moving on to compete for the Cup.

Over the course of a brilliant career, Brad had come close to sipping champagne from Lord Stanley's mug more than once. His first opportunity came in 1972 as a member of the New York Rangers. He had additional chances in 1977 and 1978 with the Boston Bruins, but each time his team fell short. In 1979 the Bruins made it to game seven of the semifinals, but a late penalty for having too many men on the ice allowed the powerhouse Montreal Canadiens to tie the game with just 72 seconds left in regulation. That tying goal led to an eventual overtime loss, which not only cost Bruins' Head Coach Don Cherry his job, but also broke the hearts of many Bruins fans.

Brad's chance to right those previous near-misses came in 1983. He scored the game-tying goal in the second period, and a scoreless third period

set up overtime at the Boston Garden. In the extra period, the Bruins took on the role of aggressor as the Buffalo Sabres played defense. A face-off win to the left of Sabres netminder Bob Sauve early in overtime allowed Brad to control the puck from the point. Seeing an opening, he fired a slap shot that was blocked by a crowd of players in front of Buffalo's net. Somehow, some way, the puck squirted loose and found its way back to Brad.

With Bruins fans clenching their rolled-up programs and perched on the edges of their seats, Brad moved in for the kill. He launched another slap shot, only this time he found a hole for the puck to travel through. The Bruins had taken the game 3–2 in overtime.

For a split second, Brad stood in disbelief with his arms raised in the air. Then the Bruins bench emptied, every teammate piled onto Brad and he collapsed to the ice in celebration. Although this was not a Stanley-Cup-winning goal, Brad had just scored the most dramatic goal of his career. It was the kind of heroic moment that every kid who ever played hockey has dreamed of, just as Brad had when he played the game with his father—also his coach—shouting encouragement from the sidelines.

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“When I was 12,” recalls Brad, “the first person who told me I would make the NHL was my father. One Saturday night we, like millions of Canadian families, were watching *Hockey Night in Canada*. It was a game between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Chicago Blackhawks. During the second period my father turned to me, smiled, and said, ‘Kid, you are going to make the NHL one day. You are a natural. I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.’ I replied happily, ‘Really, Dad?’ He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘Absolutely, just look at Stan Mikita. Boy is he ugly! In fact, all hockey players are ugly. Son, you’re a natural.’ That was my dad, he would say anything to get a reaction from us.”

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Like many of Canada's hockey greats, Brad made his first acquaintance with hockey in the outdoors and at an early age. His dad would take his two young sons to play hockey down at the local gravel pits when they flooded and froze over. Later, Bob Park would set up a small rink in the front yard for the boys to practice on. In the middle of the yard was a little evergreen tree they had to skate around, using it like an extra player or a blocker.

"That front yard rink is probably the earliest recollection I have of skating and playing hockey. The fir tree was only about six feet tall, but it looked 12 feet to me," remembers Brad. "The odd time you'd forget where it was and run into it," adds his older brother, Ron. "At nights we used to shovel the rink off and flood it. Brad and I were lucky, because we began skating at a very young age with my dad's encouragement. This allowed us to develop quickly, and as a result we could play against older kids, which always pushed you to compete harder and improve that much faster."

But before there was any thought of hockey—pond hockey or professional—there was just Brad: a moon-faced boy with bright blue eyes, born Douglas Bradford Park on July 6, 1948, the second of five children born to Bob and Betty Park. His mother chose to call him by his middle name because she felt there weren't enough Brads in the world. Ron was the eldest child, followed by Brad, Betty Anne, Lori and Shelley.

Brad's father was born in Port Glasgow, Scotland, but his family immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, and then settled in Toronto, Ontario, when he was 5 years old. Brad's mother, Betty, was born in the small town of Birtle, Manitoba, where she grew up on a farm, raising horses for harness racing. The two met during the Second World War when they were stationed in Winnipeg with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was a sergeant in charge of airplane disbursement scheduling; she was a phys-ed instructor. After marrying in Russell, Manitoba, the couple settled in Toronto to raise a family.

Hockey was part of the Park family's life from its earliest days. The first time Brad played in an organized game, he wasn't even old enough to be on the team. At the time, Bob was refereeing juvenile-level hockey games for teenagers in Unionville (northeast of Toronto), where 8-year-old Ron was playing in a tyke league with other kids his age. Grabbing his father's pant leg, Brad pestered his dad to ask the coach about playing on the team. The determined boy thought that his referee father might have some pull, but it was an absent goaltender who opened the door for Brad.

Brad recalls, "Ron's team's goaltender didn't show up, so they put me in the net even though I didn't know a thing about goaltending. A player on the other team had the puck and was skating down the left wing, so I stood in net and hugged the right post protecting the close side when he shot the puck along the ice and it went in the other side of the goal. I started crying and my mother, who was standing behind the

net, asked me why I was crying. I said, 'Because he was supposed to shoot where I was standing... not the other side!'"

Brad played the unfamiliar role of goaltender for a few more games before the regular goalie returned. Even at the age of 6, he quickly figured out that if he sprawled along the ice, his young opponents—who were still unable to lift the puck off the ice—couldn't score. His short-lived nickname became "Mr. Zero, the Shutout King." Once the coach saw how skilled and passionate Brad was, he allowed him to continue to play on the Eglinton Aces Tyke team with Ron and the older boys.

The following year, the convener asked the Park boys to leave the house league in Unionville, partly because their ability exceeded the other players around them, and also because the convener didn't want them competing in two different house leagues at the same time. Brad explains, "At the time, Ron and I were playing twice on Saturdays, first at the Unionville Arena, and then we'd travel south to play at the Scarborough house league. When the powers to be saw how we were dominating the games and they found out we were also playing in another league, they asked us to make a commitment to one or other. My father thought that the Scarborough league was better, so that was our choice."

By the time Brad was 11, he'd left the house league for the Metro League and played for the Scarborough Lions. "I played on a select team or AAA (today it is called Select in the U.S. and AAA in Canada), so we had two or three games a week and a couple of practices each week. I played left wing. My center iceman was Syl Apps Jr. who years later would also play in the NHL. We played together as kids growing up, two years of pee-wee, then two years of bantam until midget hockey. My other linemate was a right-winger named Bobby Griffin and the three of us were a top line for years."

On Sunday afternoons the boys would still practice at the Unionville Arena, the only nearby indoor ice rink available. Brad's parents would also pick up teammates Bobby Griffin, Wayne Hambly and occasionally Syl Apps Jr. in their little Envoy station wagon every week, so the back was crammed with sticks, bags and kids. "That little car had a lot of miles on it," says Brad.

Bob Griffin recalls, "Both of Brad's parents were very dedicated, passionate hockey people who knew the game. During those years, Mr. Park was our coach and he was phenomenal. He was a very good teacher and fun to play for. He was firm, but fair. He was like a second father to me. I probably

spent more time with him than I did my own dad because my father didn't get home from work until 6:30 p.m. during the week and by then I'd already be gone to the rink. To me, Bob Park was larger than life. He was like a god."

"Coaching was like a second life for my father," says Brad. "He had tremendous passion for the game."

Each night after dinner, Brad and older brother Ron would wash the dishes while their father talked hockey at the kitchen table. Bob would analyze plays that had occurred during their recent games, pointing out what had been done correctly and what could be improved upon. He taught Brad the need to be analytical in his approach as a player, to understand what worked and what didn't and why. It was during those formative years that Brad developed his keen understanding of how to break down different aspects of the game so he could improve. With these lessons, Brad had a big advantage over other kids. Not only could his father instruct him on the ice as his coach, but he also got a form of home schooling on the fundamentals of hockey. When teammates like Bobby Griffin dropped by the Park household, they too sat and listened. Griffin recalls, "He'd use salt and pepper shakers, condiment bottles and the ever-present empty bottles of Coke as 'players' on the table. He used them to teach us positional play."

"That teaching served me very well as a developing player," Brad explains. "Years later, when I played in the NHL, I was able to solve my own problems on the ice. It was probably the most enlightening time of my life because he was such a student of the game of hockey. My dad was a guy who was ahead of his time as a coach. He never played professional or anything, but he understood the game so well. He had these magnets on a board and we would use these to work on breakout plays. At the time I was just a 12- or 13-year-old kid getting advanced lessons in the fundamentals of the game. We worked on developing systems of play and breaking the game down to its finer points. When he was coaching me in games, he'd be on the bench shouting out instructions to our team; he was a very vocal coach. In a game, if I had the puck he'd belt out, 'RIGHT WING!' or 'LEFT WING!' and I was to pass it to that player. Everybody in the building could hear his booming voice. He was reading the play beforehand and shouting out what to do a split second before I'd do it. He was a very demanding coach. He showed me no special attention. If anything, he was harder on me than the other players on the team."

Ron agrees: "My dad was an amazing coach, the best I ever had. He was self-taught, and he had broken the game down into a number of different areas. One thing he taught Brad and me was how to take out the man with a hip check. We were also taught how to play angles and how to cut a man off if he was taking the puck behind the net. We knew to always get in front of him and if we kept the stick low across his body, he couldn't advance. We understood where to line up on face-offs, which men we were responsible for defensively, as well as how to reverse the puck out of our own end of the ice."

Roger Neilson, later to become a Hall of Fame NHL coach, used to come over and spend hours with Bob, becoming educated about the game. Brad recalls, "Roger was a school teacher who loved to coach both baseball and hockey. He took notice of my dad's coaching successes, so he began spending time with him in order to understand the game better. One summer I even played baseball for Roger when I was about 13."

Syl Apps Jr. offers further insight: "Bob Park was a good coach. He was loud, but never in a negative way, and he expected everybody there to play as hard as they could. If you didn't give it a good effort, you knew. If you didn't play up to your ability, he'd tell you. He was fair, but he used to push his players pretty hard. And he'd always have a Coca-Cola in his hand."

"I think my dad actually was a Coke-aholic, and he'd drink 24 Cokes a day," jokes Brad.

Bob was such a good coach, in fact, that he mastered the art of coaching even when there wasn't a game to be coached. Brad's sister Shelley explains, "My father not only coached Brad's games, he also coached in his sleep. He talked in his sleep; you could hear him yelling, 'Shoot it! Shoot it! Shoot the damn puck! Take him out! Take him out!' He would coach entire hockey games in his sleep! It wasn't a problem for my mother because she got into the whole hockey thing, too. Our whole house lived and breathed hockey, hockey, hockey."

During the winter months Brad and Bobby Griffin practically lived on the ice, playing hockey whenever possible. In their school yard at Inglewood Public School there was an outdoor rink and they'd skate, then shovel, then skate and shovel some more. "We'd start a game of two-on-two with four kids, but when more showed up to play the game would quickly grow to a game of eight-on-eight. We were usually on opposite teams because we were two of the better players and that made

it fair,” remembers Griffin. Over the summers, Brad played road hockey and baseball. “Brad was a pitcher,” Griffin continued, “for the Agincourt Lions, and they played out behind the old Agincourt arena. He was a right-handed pitcher and left-handed hitter. A couple of times he hit a home run and won 24 Sweet Marie chocolate bars for the feat, then he’d pass them out to the guys on the team. Brad was a good ball player.”

When Brad and Bobby played games for Scarborough in the Metro Toronto Hockey League (Metro East was a four-team league for eastern Toronto, Scarborough, East York and Leaside), they had to pay 50 cents apiece to play. The boys, however, found a way to keep their money. “The Ravina Gardens was an old building that has since been demolished and it was hard for them to lock all the windows and doors. Now, 50 cents wasn’t a lot of money, but you’ve got to remember that I’m growing up on powdered milk, so if we could find a way to save 50 cents, we’re saving 50 cents! So, we’d climb through this window that was next to a door. I think it was Bobby’s idea because his parents would give him the money to play and he thought up the concept that if he could get in for free, then he’d have money for hot dogs and drinks afterwards,” recalls Brad.

Brad’s home away from home in those days was the Tam O’Shanter, a multipurpose recreation center. It featured a hockey rink, curling pads, golf course, bowling alley, billiards and a swimming pool. Brad and Bobby, as kids with little or no money in their pockets, spent countless hours there keeping busy playing sports. “Our families never had much money, but you never thought of that as kids,” says Griffin. “We were rich in other ways, with so many activities to do. We always seemed to find ways to fill our days, and if we happened to break one of our \$2.50 Hespeler Micmac hockey sticks playing road hockey, we’d just tape it up or glue it back together using a clamp and just keep on playing.” Brad’s brother Ron remembers the lack of money, too: “Brad and I used to spend all day at that pool. We’d dive to the bottom looking for loose change to buy lunch.”

Early on, Brad and Ron shared a paper route to earn extra money, taking turns making the morning deliveries before school. “I had a paper route with the *Globe and Mail* when I lived on Pharmacy Avenue. Then when I moved to Inglewood, I worked for them again. This time Bobby joined me, and we shared that route. I would get up at 5 a.m. and would be out the door in 15 minutes. The delivery would take me an hour or so. I would pass the school yard rink and check on the condition of the

ice and to see if it had been flooded. Then it was my job to call all my buddies when I returned home. We'd be on the ice at 7 a.m. and play for 90 minutes until just before school started," says Brad.

Brad played in a number of tournaments during his minor-hockey career with the Scarborough Lions. The three most memorable were the International Pee-Wee Hockey Championship in Quebec, which was a part of the winter carnival in February 1960, the 11th annual Young Canada Week tournament, which took place in Goderich, Ontario, two months later, and the Boston minor-bantam tournament in March 1961.

The Quebec pee-wee championship tournament was making its debut in 1960. What started off as 28 Canadian and American teams competing for the title has now grown to over 100 teams from 15 different countries, with more than 2,000 young hockey players between the ages of 11 and 13 participating. Over the years, many future NHL stars would follow in Brad's skate prints and participate in this tournament, including Guy Lafleur, Marcel Dionne, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Eric Lindros.

But back in 1960, the tournament had not yet achieved its current level of prestige, and Brad's pee-wee hockey team had to raise the funds needed to travel to Quebec. They did this by means of a full-scale pop-bottle drive. Brad's teammate Bob Griffin remembers, "With each bottle having a deposit value of two cents, the players set out collecting as many as they could gather and store them in a garage and then take them back for deposit. For about six weeks on Saturdays we'd all go to different areas around town and collect pop bottles all day long. It seemed like we were collecting bottles forever but it was worth it. Our team was the first ever to institute a bottle drive to raise money." Coach Bob Park commented on what an unorthodox fundraiser it was. "They all thought we were mad. But the parents of my young Lions were fantastic and raised \$800 from a pop bottle drive."<sup>1</sup>

As the winter snow fell, the Scarborough Lions boarded an old Dayliner train, which is a train with two coaches, with the front car carrying the engine and a snowplow on the front, bound for Quebec. "Even though the ride only lasted five or six hours, it felt like we were traveling to another country," remembers Brad. "It took five hours to get to Montreal, and then we had to change trains to continue on to Quebec for the tournament. Like all kids would do, we were running from one car to the other to pass the time." Bob Griffin adds, "We didn't know how



big this tournament was, but when we got there . . . it was pretty exciting." After their arrival the Scarborough Lions team stepped off the train in Quebec wearing matching team jackets and red fedoras with large white feathers jutting out. "I think we wore those crazy-looking hats so that if we got lost in a crowd we'd stand out and could be found. That feather stuck up so high they'd spot us coming a mile away," says Brad.

The Quebec tournament began on February 26, 1960, with the powerhouse Lions effortlessly defeating Sherbrooke, Rosemount and Peterborough to win the AA Quebec International Pee-Wee Championship and capture the Maurice Gagnon Trophy. With the victory over Peterborough, the Lions moved on to the Grand Tournament the following day. This tournament of champions promised better competition, but the result was the same, more Lions dominance. After shutout victories over Rimouski and Montmorency, they won the Quebec City Cup, laying claim to two trophies in two days.

Syl Apps Jr. remembers the final game in the Grand Tournament. "The championship game was against the local team and it was kind of a mismatch. After we had taken a three- or four-goal lead, our coach, Bob Park, instructed us not to run up the score. He said, 'No more goals. I don't care what you do, we don't want to embarrass the other team.' He was very cognizant of the fact that these kids were playing in front of their home town and we weren't out there to try and humiliate them. The championship was never in doubt, because we knew we were going to win the game. Bob was a very fair coach in that respect."

In the end the Scarborough Lions scored a remarkable 36 goals while allowing just one in the five games in Quebec. Brad remembers, "We were just a dominating team and we actually won the championship on my father's birthday, February 27!"

The next notable pee-wee tournament for Brad was the 11th annual Lions Club Young Canada Week in Goderich, Ontario. The tournament took place in mid-April 1960, with 1,800 boys from 86 teams competing for the championship. The tourney was run on a single-loss elimination basis, but expectations were high for Scarborough's entry after their success in Quebec.

In this tournament, the competition was different but the results were the same: the Scarborough Lions could not be beat. After shutting out Detroit on the opening day, the Lions continued to destroy whatever

team was placed in front of them. They eliminated Sault Ste. Marie and Toronto Scale and won the final with a shutout win over Winnipeg to capture the AA Championship. After defeating Winnipeg, they played in another Grand Tournament the following day. The Lions roughed up Stratford and Walkerton by identical 6–2 scores and then played in their seventh game in 52 hours, defeating New Hamburg 8–1 in the final.

“I was amazed at the applause and the cheers our players got,” said Team Manager Harry McLean after the win. “We had been told a Toronto team plays the villain’s role here. But the spectators, the other coaches and officials, even the kids on the other teams, were all rooting for us.”<sup>2</sup>

On St. Patrick’s Day, 1961, the Scarborough Lions roared into Wellesley, Massachusetts, to compete in the Greater Boston Bantam League Invitation Tournament. Once again the players successfully raised money to fund the bus trip by collecting pop bottles. The prestigious Lions team was one of only two Canadian teams invited to participate in the event: the other team was Montmorency from Quebec, a team the Lions defeated a year earlier.

The weekend tournament began with Scarborough shutting out the local Wellesley team despite a slow start following the long bus ride to the tournament. The next night the Lions beat the Suburban All-Stars before taking home yet another championship with a 3–0 win over Belmont on Sunday evening. Brad recalls, “In that bantam tournament we were a first-year bantam team playing against some older kids. We were excited by the fact that we were traveling to the United States to play, and we got to have a tour of Boston and a tour of the Boston Garden, which was unbelievable. It was a tremendous experience, but we still stayed focused on why we were there, to win.”

Bob Griffin remembers what made Brad stand out in those early days. “The thing I admired the most about Brad—aside from his fearlessness—is that he was never the best player on our team growing up, or the best skater for that matter, but he found a way to keep improving each year. Sure, he had talent but the key for him was he just kept getting better because he had the smarts to do so. If you went to the rink every week, you wouldn’t have picked Brad Park out from the crowd and said, ‘He’s going to make it to the NHL someday.’ But he was so passionate about the game and so good with the little things, and when he learned how to throw a good hip check, he’d just send guys flying.”

Brad's youngest sister, Shelley, recalls that the passion for hockey wasn't all Brad's and that the key to his early successes came from the support of Bob and Betty. "Brad is an amazing person, but it was also the amount of effort my parents put into his playing," she says today. "It was their passion as much as it was his. They never did all this because they thought that Brad would become famous one day, they were just passionate about it. They'd pack all five kids in the car every night of the week, including weekends, to go to their practices and games. I'd get dragged to the rink so often that I often joked that my best friends growing up were the Zamboni men."

Even extended family members were part of Brad's hockey education. With fighting and physical play being parts of a complete hockey player's toolbox, Brad wanted to learn how to handle himself. When he was about 15, he asked his uncle John Fisher, a black belt in jujitsu, to show him a few moves. He taught Brad how to use an opponent's weight and strength against him.

"Anytime you're going to fight in a hockey game, the first thing you need to deal with is ignoring your fear," reasons Brad. "Even when I was a kid playing minor hockey, fighting was not outlawed, so occasionally you'd have to fight. I had some big scraps, especially in junior with the Toronto Marlies. Those lessons became very beneficial throughout my career."

However, it wasn't always smooth sailing within the Park family, and the competitive relationship between Ron and Brad was especially difficult at times. Like many brothers they would fight, and Brad, being younger and smaller, often got the worst in their altercations.

"We fought like cats and dogs. Ron had an unbelievable temper and I usually took the brunt of it for a number of years. One time I was about 13 years old and he was 15 and we were home alone in the basement and he kicked the crap out of me. So I ran upstairs and got a broom handle and returned to the basement and I threw it at him like a spear and it missed him. Then he grabbed it and chased me up the stairs and threw it back at me the same way and it missed me, but went through the window of our front door! Then the dilemma became 'What are we gonna tell Mom and Dad?' Ron was already nursing an injury to his hand, so I concocted a story that he lost his balance coming up the stairs, his hand went through the window and it was amazing that he didn't get cut. This was invented to avoid any punishment, and luckily they bought it."

Brad and Ron were always roughhousing and causing minor damage to the Park house. The evidence was abundant, as Shelley explains: "There were many holes in the walls caused by my brothers. They would be practicing hip checks or some strategic move. Then somebody would get a little more aggressive and it would turn into an all-out brawl and fistfight. Inevitably somebody's fist or head would go through the wall."

"Our household was very competitive and very athletic, and not just hockey," Shelley affirms. "God forbid that you came home from school and you didn't make a team that you had tried out for that day. The Park kids were not a tall bunch, but we played absolutely every sport imaginable and we were expected to go out for every team and make the team. If you failed, you'd be asked, 'Why, what's the problem?'"

On Saturday nights the family would watch *Hockey Night in Canada* while Brad and Ron assembled Shirriff plastic hockey coins on the living room floor in front of the TV. "One of our neighbors worked for Shirriff Foods, and they were looking for people to do piecework and pop the pictures of the hockey players in the disks," Brad explained. "I grew up on powdered milk and our family was going through tough times, so any extra money we could make we did. Let's just say that there was many a supper where there was no meat in the pot. My dad didn't start selling insurance until I was 12 years old. My brother and I slept in a bedroom in the basement. We certainly didn't grow up with a silver spoon in our mouth. I had a paper route when I was 10 years old, and I kept delivering right up until grade 10 in high school. I wasn't going to impress many girls with that, that's for sure, and I wasn't exactly a handsome guy. I had a crew cut and big ears that stuck out as well."

The basement bedroom that Brad and Ron shared was lined with shelving for all of their trophies. "It was just overflowing with ribbons, crests and trophies that we had won playing sports," reminisces Ron. "It was an amazing childhood being the older brother and having a little brother wanting to tag along. Sometimes I was a bit of a hard case with him, but together we'd take on anyone. I remember my brother getting into an altercation up at the school one time. A couple of guys were picking on him, so I had to come over and we sort of fixed their wagon. I also got into a bit of a scruff at one of the baseball diamonds and my brother came over and put his nose in between a couple of guys. Even though he and I competed against each

other, we still always stuck up for one another. If someone wanted to give one of us grief, the other was there to watch his back.”

Brad and Ron’s summers were primarily full of sports and mischief. The two boys would spend countless hours riding around on their bicycles looking for excitement. They would often travel several miles to go to the movies or to fish for trout at a stream that ran through the farmland six or seven miles north of their subdivision.

Sometimes, the mischief could get serious. “At the junction of Pharmacy Avenue and Highway 401 there was a huge farm,” Ron recalls. “On that farm was a barn that was maybe 60 feet by 40 feet and it was packed with hay and had huge rafters. Brad and I would play tag on the rafters. I remember chasing my brother along the rafters and one time he fell. I thought he was dead, but he’d just sprained his ankle. This was one of the first times I was really scared because I thought he had killed himself.”

The barn was the scene of an even more serious incident, as Ron recounts: “Our neighbor Jamie had a bow and arrows. He had the bright idea of wrapping the long grass around the arrows and then lighting it. Well, he shot one and it went inside the top of the rafters of the barn and lit the hay on fire and the barn burned down. There must have been eight or nine fire engines there trying to put out the blaze. We kept our mouths shut as to who was responsible.”

Brad also vividly recalls the incident: “I was about 8 and Ron 10 when this happened. Afterwards, I was scared to death. This was a big old barn full of dry, stale hay, it was abandoned, and it fully ignited so quickly. Being the younger brother, I was told to keep my mouth shut and I did, but for the next year I stayed clear of the police and firemen.”

When Brad and Ron were 12 and 14, their mother would drive them to diving lessons three or four times a week. They got quite adept at performing challenging dives and daredevil flips off the high diving board. All these two hot dogs needed was a platform to showcase their talents. Ron explains, “Early in the morning my mom would drive us to Agincourt Community Centre. I remember the pool’s water being freezing cold because it was still in the morning. Anyway, my brother and I got pretty proficient at doing flips, one-and-a-halves. Also at that time, CFTO-TV had a local teenage dance show in the mornings. We used to go to it, although we never danced. We’d just sit there and listen to the music, but one time the show

was being filmed at the pool. With Brad and I being able to perform these dives and flips, we were able to grab a lot of camera time. We were big show-offs who couldn't wait to get in front of that camera."

These flips also came in handy when Brad's parents purchased a backyard trampoline for the boys to enjoy. Their little sister Betty Anne also got into the act. "Every morning in the summer after we did our chores we'd be free for the day and whoever was the first one out to the trampoline got it first for a good hour. We'd do flips, sits and jumps and we would attach a belt to Betty Anne who was a figure skater and had some athletic moves. We taught her how to do a flip as well," says Ron today.

Shelley also recalls some daredevil hijinks: "When I was about 5, Lori was 7, Betty Anne 13, Brad 15 and Ron 17, my parents went away, and we had just had a huge snowstorm in Toronto. Of course, the boys had to shovel the driveway. So they piled all this snow up in front of our house. At that time we just had a bungalow. After filling our front yard with snow they proceeded to hose down the roof so it became a sheet of ice. They got a ladder out and we started tobogganing down the roof into the snow pile and then out onto the road—real safe things to do. Naturally, I was afraid to go down the roof. My nickname was Runt, being the baby of the family, the runt of the litter. So Brad said, 'No, it's okay, Runt, I'll go down with you.' I always believed Brad, so I agreed to go down with him. As we went down the roof, at the last minute he dug his heels into the eaves trough and pushed me. I went head first into the huge snowbank, so deep that my heels were the only thing sticking out. They were all killing themselves laughing about it. I remember thinking, 'Okay, I can't breathe—I'm dying here.' They finally pulled me out by my legs."

If high-spirited horseplay was the norm for Brad at home, on the hockey rink he was all business. He was a grade eight student when he won the Teeder Kennedy Award for being the outstanding player on his elementary school hockey team. A plaque was presented to Brad by Toronto Maple Leafs legend Ted "Teeder" Kennedy, who lived in Brad's neighborhood. "I remember him with the Leafs, but I was just 8 when he retired so I didn't get to see him play very much. But it was an honor."

A couple of years later, when Brad was 15 and playing midget hockey, his father moved him from his normal position of left wing to defense. He felt that his diminutive son would have too difficult a time battling with the much larger defensive players on the opposing teams. "At that

time I was chunky, but only five feet tall. I was a little surprised by the move, but then I realized that the defensemen on the team got more ice time, so I was happy with the decision. Playing forward meant I skated every third shift and playing defense meant every second shift, so that's how I justified the switch to myself. Now the task was to learn a whole new position and it took me a while to adjust." Brad would adjust to his new position and eventually flourish there.

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In 1963, Brad had to make another adjustment when his father accepted a promotion to become a district sales manager for Allstate Insurance in Montreal. "I remember when our family moved to Montreal and my brother Ron and I were playing road hockey and shooting a tennis ball around in the driveway. I slapped one so hard that it broke the window. When my dad came home he was very upset with me. He asked, 'What have you got to say for yourself?' I said, 'You've been telling me that my shot wouldn't break a pane of glass. Well...it can.'"

"Brad and I played hockey in the driveway nearly every day," recalls Ron. "We'd practice playing goalie and shooter and playing one-on-one. Inevitably Brad would wear me down. I seem to recall him winning more games than I did, so I would get frustrated with him and beat the heck out of him. Brad was a tenacious player who lived and breathed hockey."

Brad picks up the story: "We moved there just after Christmas. While living in Montreal, my brother and I both tried out for the same team, the Lakeshore Flyers, which was a junior B team. I made the club, but my brother was cut. I was 15 and he was 17, and they figured that they would have me longer to work with. It was at this time that Ron stopped playing hockey." Even though Ron was a strong player in his own right, he got sidetracked as a teenager—once he discovered girls. "When he got to high school he started playing football. That became his focus because of the cheerleaders. The girls were more accessible and worth the transition into that sport."

After only six months in Montreal, Bob Park moved his family back to Toronto, feeling that he could make more money as a salesman than as a district manager. Shortly after his family returned, Brad's father was approached by Jim Gregory, the general manager of the Toronto Marlboros, to take the job of coaching the Neil McNeil Catholic High School Junior B team. Gregory saw something special in Brad and wanted Bob to

continue being his coach. Gregory explains, "Brad Park was playing in Scarborough when scout Bob Davidson mentioned him to me. Davidson kept me informed about players from Scarborough. I went to see him play and Brad's father was coaching Brad's team. After watching Brad play I was very interested in getting him to play for us." Brad joined the team, attended the Catholic school, and was paid \$2.50 a game to play hockey.

"I was 16 years old and physically awkward," recalls Brad. "I had grown eight inches over the course of the year, so my coordination hadn't caught up to my body yet." Even so, Neil McNeil's general manager, Frank Bonello, also saw a lot of potential in Brad: "When you watched Brad during his time at Neil McNeil, you were seeing a very good skater and a belligerent type of guy. He always came to play, was a little on the aggressive side, so he always had marks on him."

The experience of coaching at Neil McNeil was short-lived for Bob. After just a few months, Brad's father quit because he found the egos of the players too frustrating to deal with. When a replacement coach was found, Brad barely saw the ice for the rest of the year, punishment for his father leaving the team.

In the summer of 1965, when Brad was nearing 17, he took a summer job at the Uplands Golf Club in Thornhill, Ontario. His dad knew the owner, Reg Acomb, so he pulled a few strings to get Brad the summer position of groundskeeper. "When you are the last guy on the totem pole, you get all the tough jobs. I would arrive in the morning around 6:30 a.m. and I'd have to walk the whole course from green to green with a 15-foot bamboo pole and swish the dew off the grass so that the members wouldn't have to worry about wet grass when they were golfing. After an hour of that, I'd go back to the maintenance barn and fetch the lawn mower. The mower wasn't a self-propelled type, so I had to push it manually all over the course. One of my tasks was to cut the rough. I would spend most of my day cutting that part of the grounds. The toughest part of the job, however, was trying to cut the grass on the riverbed. There were steep embankments there and I would have to tie a rope to the mower and lower it down the 40-foot embankment to try to get at all the grass. While doing all this physical work I was getting a pretty good workout with my arms and shoulders. By the end of the summer I was ripped and in really good shape for hockey."



Brad's new physique didn't go unnoticed by older brother Ron, who was accustomed to playfully bullying his little brother. Brad's sudden growth spurt, combined with a summer of hard physical labor, proved to be a little more than Ron had bargained for. "Brad and I had always gone to a friend's cottage during the summer up at Six Mile Lake, just east of Georgian Bay. One contest that we had was to see who could throw the other off the dock into the water. I had won for years because I was always bigger and stronger. One time, I was lying on the dock and a boat pulled up and this guy jumped out and onto the dock. I hadn't seen Brad for a couple of months because I was at the cottage while he worked at the golf and country club, so I didn't recognize who it was until he got closer to me. It was my brother! I couldn't believe the size of him. During that time he had a growth spurt and shot up about six or seven inches and gained maybe 40 pounds of muscle. That was the first time I knew that I was going to be the one in the water. After that, I never beat him at anything again."

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While family remained important to Brad, the majority of his focus was on improving his hockey skills. "I learned a lot through midget and junior B hockey, and by the time I got to junior A my coach Gus Bodnar taught me that when a player comes down the ice towards me to put my palm on his chest to control where he's going to go. So the next time I tried it, the attacking forward bent my hand all the way back and nearly broke my wrist. I said to myself, 'That ain't going to work.' So I began to teach myself how to play defense, and I drew on the analytical knowledge I had learned at the kitchen table from my father. When I was beaten on a play, I thought about what went wrong and how to make sure that it never would happen again. On the flip side, if something offensive worked from the backend, I tried to remember what I did and why it worked and then added that to my bag of tricks. I was learning how to solve my own problems."

When Neil McNeil's hockey program was scrapped, Brad transferred to Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate Institute in Scarborough so he would be closer to home. After graduating from grade 13, Brad, at the urging of his parents, decided to return for an extra year to improve his grades, just in case he wanted to attend college or university. "In those days, even if you were drafted by an NHL team there was no guarantee you were going

to make it, especially with just six teams in the league at that time. There were good hockey players that I played against who were a bit older than me and they never made it to the National Hockey League. This gave me pause to think about my future. So coming out of junior hockey I was just hoping to be good enough to play professionally, but you're never sure. My attitude was simply to try and make pro and make a living at it, but if it hadn't worked out I don't know what I would have done for a career. When you are 19 years old, nobody thinks that far ahead."

After leaving Neil McNeil, Brad was free to pursue other opportunities in hockey. He was offered two tryouts, one by the Toronto Marlboros for their junior B camp and the other from the Hamilton Red Wings junior A camp. Hamilton's scout, Donnie Graham, was impressed enough with Brad's potential that he recommended coach Eddie Bush offer Brad a tryout with their junior A camp.

Naturally, wanting to play at the higher level, Brad was interested in the prospect of playing for Hamilton. The problem was there would be no guarantee—if he didn't make the junior A team in Hamilton, he might be sent to the organization's junior B farm team in far-off Flin Flon, Manitoba. This was a concern for Brad's parents, who didn't want him playing that far from home.

With Brad determined to go to Hamilton and take his chances, Bob Park arranged a meeting with Toronto Marlboros General Manager Jim Gregory. He was able to use the Hamilton situation as leverage to convince Gregory to do him a favor, and extend Brad a tryout with their junior A team. Then, following the meeting, Brad's parents made sure their son would stay near home by concocting a story that Brad had been claimed by the Toronto Maple Leafs on a Priority Draft List. This meant that he couldn't go to Hamilton's training camp—he would simply have to accept the Marlies' offer. "In truth there never was a priority draft list, but I didn't learn the truth until about six months later," recalls Brad.

All of this string-pulling occurred at the last minute—it was only the night before the Marlies' junior A camp opened that an invitation was extended to Brad to attend. After some consideration, Brad accepted the offer, meaning that Bob Park's last-minute coup had worked, just as he had planned. Now it was up to Brad to prove he belonged at the junior A level, and to justify both his father's and Jim Gregory's faith in him.