



Courtesy of Perry Bergson, The Brandon Sun

Blaine Peterson still remembers the pride he felt the first time he pulled on a Brandon Wheat Kings jersey.

Now 64, the former Brandon goaltender spent parts of three seasons with the club between 1973 and 1975. He shared the crease with one of the most iconic goaltenders in franchise history, and coached another.



BRANDON SUN FILE PHOTO Former Brandon Wheat Kings netminder Blaine Peterson is shown in net with the mighty New Westminster Bruins in a game at the Keystone Centre following a trade there on Dec. 4, 1975.

"It was huge," Peterson said of playing with the Wheat Kings. "They hadn't gone into the rural areas that much, and for a guy from a town of 400 people to make it to the Wheat Kings, that was huge. I was so proud to put that jersey on. It was something else."

Peterson was born in Ste. Anne, but the family moved from their farm near the tiny community of Prairie Grove in 1961 to take over the farm belonging to his mother Doreen's parents near Cartwright.

They were seven miles from town, so Peterson's first time on ice came on the farm. His father Jim cleared off a dugout, and the five- or six-year-old Peterson and his two older sisters skated.

"You watch kids skate around and it looks pretty easy," Peterson said. "It was pretty frustrating when you couldn't go like them."

In later years, his father made a rink in the backyard. He said his parents were a big part of all of his activities.

"All of the kids were involved in something and I guess it was our parents' goal that we not sit at home watching TV," Peterson said. "I was playing sports, my sisters were playing sports and doing other things. Everybody was involved. They were tremendous to make sure that we were active."

Peterson became a goalie in an unexpected way. He was playing forward with the 10-and-under team in Cartwright, and the 8U team was without a goalie one weekend. The team got permission for an older player to strap on the pads, and Peterson backstopped the squad to a tournament victory in Clearwater.

He was hooked and never looked back.

"It was being in the action," Peterson said. "Everybody likes success, it doesn't matter how old you are. I guess with a little bit (of success) from the get-go, I was decent at it. I could track the puck and move my feet a little bit and it just went from there."



BRANDON SUN FILE PHOTOFormer Brandon Wheat Kings netminder Blaine Peterson is shown in net with the mighty New Westminster Bruins in a game at the Keystone Centre following a trade there on Dec. 4, 1975.

Peterson certainly looked up to the Wheat Kings as a youngster. On Jan. 7, 1961, he marked his fifth birthday by attending a game at the old Wheat City Arena.

"That was a thrill," Peterson said.

He grew up playing with Cartwright teams, but in his first year of midget, the rural squads were amalgamated and Peterson joined Killarney with a couple of his teammates.

He was scouted and listed by the Brandon Wheat Kings at age 15. It was mostly an unknown situation to the teenager netminder at the time.

"We didn't know anything about it, but I got a letter from the Wheat Kings that said I was put on their protected list and we went from there," Peterson said.

He also had an early look behind the scenes that made an indelible impression on the youngster.

"When I was 15, Dave McClelland was the goaltender and George Silva was the backup but Dave had to go home for a funeral, so they called me up to be the backup," Peterson said. "A 15-year-old kid in with Dale Cook and guys like that, they were men to me. It was great."

By age 16, Rudy Pilous had replaced Gerry Brisson as Brandon's coach, and Peterson was given a long look in training camp prior to the 1972-73 season.

He was sent to the Brandon Travellers, a first-year organization that wouldn't gain entry into the Manitoba Junior Hockey League until a season later. Instead, the young team played in the South West Hockey League, a senior loop, and participated in the provincial junior B playoffs.

"There were a bunch of us pups playing against the men," Peterson said. "It was pretty good."

In his 17-year-old year, Peterson split the 1973-74 campaign between the Wheat Kings and the Travellers, where 16-year-old Glen Hanlon joined him as a goaltending partner for the first time.

Peterson was called up by the Wheat Kings for five games after the Travellers season ended, and was welcomed by starting goalie Wayne Wilhelm.



(BRANDON SUN FILE PHOTO) Former Brandon Wheat Kings goalie Blaine Peterson is shown as an assistant coach with the team, a job he held for two seasons under head coach Les Jackson.

"He's one of the finest people you'll ever meet," Peterson said. "Even after the hockey was done, we were great friends with Wayne and June and got to know their three daughters. He's salt of the earth. He was great. I was a young guy who wanted to see if he could play a little bit, so he stepped aside for five games there at the end. He's a true professional and a great teammate."

Both teams played out of the Keystone Centre, with Travellers called up to the Wheat Kings as needed. The players knew each other well as a result.

"The guys who played with the Travellers were in camp quite a while and then the teams got split to the Wheat Kings and the Travellers," Peterson said.

"It was certainly respect for the Wheat Kings when you were playing with the Travellers, and the Wheat Kings treated us well. Guys would go up and down due to injuries. Everyone was treated well."

The teams certainly had a special place to call home.

The Keystone was a new building at that time, and Peterson said it was an incredible place to play.

"In the Western (Canadian) Hockey League, that was state of the art," Peterson said. "You had the Winnipeg Arena of course, which was a grand old building, but this was brand new. It was great. You go to some of the other places that didn't have that great of facilities and you were thankful with what you had with the Keystone."

In the 1974-75 season, Peterson and Hanlon made the jump to the Wheat Kings.

Peterson appeared in 30 games, with Hanlon seeing action in 43. The future National Hockey League star held an edge in goals-against average (4.23 to 5.04) and save percentage (.892 to .854) in that high-scoring era.

"The expectations are different," Peterson said of being a Wheat King. "When I was 17 and played a few games at the end of the year, you're doing your best and whatever happens, happens. When you're 18 and you make the squad, the expectations are there. I didn't answer the bell and Glen took over."

Despite the battle for playing time, Hanlon and Peterson roomed together on the road and became good friends. Hanlon went on to a 15-year career in the NHL.

"He's a class act," Peterson said. "He was good. He got drafted in the third round and how many years did he play in the NHL? He was good, but I didn't sulk about it or anything. I still worked hard in practice and pushed him to some degree. There was never any animosity between us."



BRANDON SUN FILE PHOTO Former Brandon Wheat Kings goalie Blaine Peterson is shown as an assistant coach with the team, a job he held for two seasons under head coach Les Jackson.

Dunc McCallum took over behind the bench for the 1975-76 season, Peterson's final year with the club.

"It was a tough year but it was just a perfect situation for Dunc to come in and lay the groundwork for what was going to be a great four or five years," Peterson said. "Billy Derlago was on the 1974-75 team and then (Brian) Propp and (Ray) Allison, those guys came along with (Dave) Semenko. Dunc just straightened everything out.

"He had the pedigree and had the presence and took that whole organization and made it. He was the biggest part of the whole hockey club."

Hanlon was also back for the 1975-76 campaign, and the 19-year-old Peterson could see the writing on the wall. He asked Wheat Kings GM Jack Brockest and McCallum for a trade.

"They understood," Peterson said. "They knew I wanted to play. It was evident that Glen was going to get the majority of the games. Fair ball. He was playing really well. Good goaltender, good guy but I wanted to play too, and in hockey they only play one goaltender at a time."

The situation had been ongoing for a while, with several teams kicking the tires on a potential trade. When New Westminster Bruins starter Kerry Nisbet injured his knee, however, Peterson was dispatched to the league leaders on Dec. 4, 1975 for 18-year-old defenceman Terry Hochstetter.

Brandon was playing Saskatoon that night and Peterson was having his afternoon nap when his billet woke him up to take a call from Bruins head coach Ernie (Punch) McLean.

It was a big step for the farm kid from Cartwright, who was suddenly heading to Vancouver.

"The great thing about going to play junior hockey when you're a young age is you have a tendency to maybe grow up a little quicker," Peterson said.

"I had the luxury of only being 80 miles or a phone call away. I was away from home but I wasn't.

"When you're going to the other side of the league — I remember getting dropped off at the airport, where I actually met Terry Hochstetter, the guy who I was traded for — and halfway through the flight I'm thinking 'I don't know a soul out there.' But Ernie and (general manager) Bill (Shinske) were fabulous, my teammates were good. It was pretty much seamless."

Peterson noted the team was so good they didn't need their goalie to win games for them.



GLEN HANLON
... shutout



TERRY HOCHSTETTER
... to Brandon



BLAINE PETERSON
... to New West

Hanlon looks like number one goalie

by **BRUCE PENTON**
Sun Sports Writer

There has always been a reluctance in Brandon Wheat Kings' camp to use the No. 1 or No. 2 tag when talking about goalies Glen Hanlon and Blaine Peterson.

Hanlon, who got the starting call from coach Dunc McCallum Thursday to fend off the high-flying Saskatoon Blades, played like a No. 1 goalie in stopping the westerners 3-0.

And now, he is No. 1. Unequivocally. For the moment, he's the only one they've got.

Peterson, 19, was dealt to New Westminster Bruins earlier Thursday for 18-year-old defenceman Terry Hochstetter, and although the Cartwright, Man., goaltender knew of the deal three hours before the battle with the Blades, he didn't let on to his team-mates that it was to be his last game amongst them.

Hanlon, who has played about 65 per cent of the Wheat Kings' games this year and generally laid claim to the No. 1

handle, wasn't over-worked against the Blades, who lead the Eastern Division by 11 points over runner-up Brandon.

The 18-year-old red-head, who was rendered speechless when he learned of the trade following the game, had to stop only 23 shots in recording his second shutout of the season. Fourteen of those drives came in the third period.

It was a night of milestones:

- Brandon became the first Eastern team to score a victory over the Blades;

- It was the first time Blades had been blanked this season; their last scoreless game was February of last season a 4-0 defeat in New Westminster;

- Blades' high-scoring forwards, Bernie Federko and Blair Chapman, one-two in the scoring race, each had 14-game point streaks snapped;

- Dale McMullin stretched his consecutive-game point streak to 13 with his 19th goal of the season and Danny Bonar's point string sits at 12 now following his assist on the winning goal, scored at 2:39 of the first period by Dale Parker.

BRANDON SUN FILE PHOTOThe Brandon Sun chronicles Blaine Peterson's trade.

He made 30 appearances in the last half of the season as the Bruins posted a 54-14-4 record, finishing 36 points ahead of Brandon. Naturally, the two teams met in the best-of-nine quarterfinal, which New West won 5-0.

"It was tough," Peterson said. "I guess you would have to say that Brandon was the underdog in that one. I didn't want to embarrass myself, especially playing in Brandon."

New West beat Victoria 4-0-1 in the semifinal, setting up a final between the West Division champions and the East Division champion Saskatoon Blades.

Unfortunately, Peterson wasn't on the ice to see the Bruins win their second league title in a row. Instead, he was hurt by a hard shot in warmup.

"One of my teammates hit me in the shoulder," Peterson said. "You kind of get up and work it out, work it out, work it out, and we're getting ready to start the first period and Ernie says 'Can you start?' What are you going to do? You're 19 and it's your draft year. 'Ya, I can go.' About three minutes in, I think it was Bernie Federko (of the Blades) who dumped the puck in and I made the motion with my glove hand because it was a foot wide and the collarbone just exploded."

Peterson said it tough but added it was part of the highs and lows that come with the sport.

"I was 18 and supposed to be the guy in Brandon, and Glen came in and took over," Peterson said. "Then I get to New West so I'm on a peak and then I'm in a valley. You just deal with it."

By coincidence, the Bruins picked up Hanlon for the 1976 Memorial Cup, where they fell 5-2 to the Hamilton Fincups in the final of the three-team tournament in Montreal.

Peterson returned for his overage season in 1976-77, and after posting career-best numbers, New West beat the regular season champion Wheat Kings 4-1 in the best-of-seven final.

It was a different story for the Bruins at the Memorial Cup in Vancouver in 1977 as the Bruins topped the Ottawa 67's 6-5 to win the first of back-to-back championships at the tournament.

"Players take such great pride to get there and to win is even better but there was a little bit of pressure on the organization because they had gone two years in a row," Peterson said.

"The first year was a surprise (in 1975) and the next year that club was destined to go and came up short. The third year in 1977, it was in Vancouver and having come up empty in the first two tries, and not having near the club on paper we had the year before, it was going to be tough slogging to get there, but we got there."

Peterson also dressed with the Vancouver Canucks as an emergency replacement for the injured Cesare Maniago for seven games between Nov. 27 and Dec. 11, 1976. Former Wheat King Curt Ridley, who spent five games with Brandon in the 1970-71 season, played every minute, so Peterson didn't take the ice.

After graduating from the WHL, Peterson went to the International Hockey League's Kalamazoo Wings the next season, playing one game before he was released. (The Wings also cut future NHL goalies Richard Sevigny and Greg Millen that year.)

The Cartwright product returned to Brandon, where he spent a season with the Brandon Olympics senior team that included several former Wheat Kings, including Bryan Hextall Jr., Roy McLachlan, Jack Borotsik, Jim Murray, Bob Jaska, Ray Brownlee, Ron Pronchuk and Dan McPherson.

He said listening to the stories on the bus was one of his favourite parts of the experience. But his passion for being on the ice was gone.

"I had kind of lost the zip to play so I thought I would like to get into coaching," said Peterson,

His wish was quickly granted. He was hired as an assistant coach by Wheat Kings head coach Les Jackson, who also played in New West, and Brockest, a job Peterson kept for the 1979-80 and 1981-82 seasons.

Peterson had goaltenders Ron Popplestone, Rick Knickle and Scott Olson in the first year, and in his second year a pair of Brandonites, Todd Lumbard and a youngster named Ron Hextall.

Peterson noted he played with Ron's father Bryan, so the young goalie came by his competitiveness honestly.

"He expected everybody who played with him to be the same way," Peterson said.

"The thing about Ronny was that as competitive as he was, goals were going to be scored on him because that's going to happen. It didn't derail him. He would think about it. 'What happened and what I can I do better?' That was him, just to get better and better and better."

After his second season on the bench, McCallum returned to Brandon and Jackson and Peterson were fired. By that time, however, Peterson had found the job he would retire from 26 years later.

He was coaching a minor hockey team, with Glen Clark serving as manager. Clark, who was the tower chief at McGill Field, took Peterson on an informal tour after a hockey meeting out at the airport.

Peterson was hooked, and began an 11-month course in February 1980, receiving his licence to become an air-traffic controller in January 1981. After four years in Brandon, he spent 22 years in Winnipeg until he retired in 2006.

The lessons he had learned in hockey proved to be a good fit in the tower, where a team of controllers bring order to the sky.

"Air traffic control is a lot like a team sport like hockey," Peterson said. "Everyone works together to make everything work. When you're working in the air control centre, in our airspace there might be 10 or 12 people working. People are handing off and co-ordinating. 'What are we going to do here? We have a problem here. How are we going to do this? How are we going to fix that?' It was a lot of teamwork."

Peterson and his partner Paulette, who settled in Stonewall, have two children together, a daughter Teague who lives in Australia, and a son, Kael.

Before he left Brandon, Peterson served as an assistant coach at Assiniboine Community College, and after he moved to Stonewall, he coached both of his kids.

His son played in the Manitoba U18 AAA Hockey League with the Interlake Lightning, and when Kael graduated, Blaine was recruited to serve as president.

He did that for a few years, took a couple of years off, did it for four more, and now serves as the league's past-president.

"The game has been good to me," Peterson said. "You have to give back a little bit. The good times and the bad times, you pass those along and you hope everybody has good times."

Peterson certainly did.

He said the game taught him a lot of life skills and a lot about himself. He enjoyed hockey and stayed in it as a result.

"It was a great ride," Peterson said. "You have a lot of fun. You meet some great people, you meet some characters, good and bad, and you learn from both. It was a lot of fun."