

Hockey fans throughout Dufferin County meet Mats Sundin at book signing

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A sea of blue and white jerseys descended on one of Orangeville's local arenas as Toronto Maple Leaf fans and hockey fans alike gathered for a moment to meet NHL legend ? Mats Sundin.

Local book store, Booklore, hosted a special book signing event with Sundin on Oct. 23 at the Alder Arena as part of a tour celebrating the launch of his newly released autobiography, Home and Away.

?I had known for some time that we were getting Mats Sundin, but had to keep it secret until the publisher, Simon and Schuster, announced his tour. We put in a proposal for him and were overjoyed that we were chosen ? it was only a week tour and we were the only independent bookstore,? said Nancy Frater, owner of Booklore.

Booklore sold 300 copies of Sundin's book ahead of the book signing, with a portion of the profits going to the Orangeville Wolves.

?I think the best aspect for us was that BookLore could contribute something to our community by bringing an NHL star of his caliber and even more so by donating a percentage of the book's profits to the Orangeville Wolves,? said Frater. ?I wanted to collaborate with a hockey team and the Orangeville Wolves, a special needs hockey team, was the perfect choice because everyone deserves a chance to play on a team. The parents, coaches and others connected with the Wolves put so much into their support of this team.?

Before the doors opened for fans, players from the Orangeville Wolves had a moment to meet with Sundin one-on-one for photos, autographs and a charismatic fist-bump.

?They struggle day-to-day, and when they get singled out like this on a positive level, it brings their level up that much more. These are memories that they will talk about forever,? said Kim Thompson, co-manager of the Orangeville Wolves.

As they stood in a winding line, fans held onto photos, posters, jerseys and other memorabilia from Sundin's 13 seasons with the Toronto Maple Leafs, 11 of which he was captain.

Some fans, like Kayla Mantle, took the time to begin reading their copies of Home and Away while they waited for their moment to meet with the hockey superstar.

?I cried in the first chapter. I'm very nostalgic and sentimental for Mats Sundin,? joked Mantle while speaking with the Free Press. ?I watched him play for the Nordiques when I was eight or nine years old, and ever since then it was all about Mats Sundin for me. I had the framed posters in my room and the Leafs bedding on my bed. I really respected him growing up and as an adult, it hasn't really wavered. My love for the Leafs is consistent, but you always have your favorites, and he was always mine.?

Many of the adults at the book signing, who reminisced about growing up watching Sundin as captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs, shared in the excitement of meeting their hockey hero with the next generation of fans; their own children.

Orangeville resident, Kris Ponte was accompanied to the book signing by his sons, 10-year-old Nicky and 7-year-old A.J.

?They're getting to meet my hero,? Ponte told the Free Press. ?I think these guys are a lot more excited than I am, but it's pretty cool to see someone that you grew up admiring and following and cheering for. It's not every day you get to do that, it's a real opportunity.?

Home and Away, is an unfiltered look at Sundin's time playing hockey in Sweden and across North America. Starting with his childhood growing up in the outskirts of Stockholm Sweden, Home and Away explores Sundin's experiences being drafted in 1989 at 18 years old to the Quebec Nordiques, his trade to the Toronto Maple Leafs in exchange for the highly popular Leaf captain, Wendel Clark, and the 13 season he spent with the team.

Sundin's autobiography, Home and Away was published on Oct. 22.