

Dufferin teacher pens memoir on NHL career and the dark side of hockey



Written By **Brian Lockhart**

Considering the current upheaval in the world of Canadian hockey that has been making the news recently, former hockey player Justin Davis's book, *Conflicted Scars: An Average Player's Journey to the NHL*, couldn't have been released at a better time.

Davis chronicles his athletic experience through three levels of Junior hockey, a career in the OHL, and becoming an NHL draft pick for the Washington Capitals.

Davis is now a phys ed teacher at Orangeville District Secondary school and also coaches the school's boy's hockey team.

"I played AAA in Halton, Junior C in Flamborough, Junior B in Cambridge, and then on to the OHL," Davis said of playing every Junior division in the province. "I played in the OHL when I was in grade 11."

He was on the Ottawa 67's in 1999 - the year the team won the Memorial Cup. He was drafted by the Capitals but never played a game for them.

Davis decided to start writing a memoir of his hockey career when he had to take time off of work to deal with problems he still experienced from getting concussions while playing on the ice.

'I had my NHL draft jersey, my Memorial Cup ring, an Allan Cup ring, and I won a championship at Western, but I really kind of had it hidden away, and my kids would always ask about it. I was off work on a short-term disability with a back injury and had post-concussion issues. I thought I'd write a little memoir to my kids - 10 to 15 pages - and tell them about my career in case I start to forget things in 15 years.'

He started writing the memoir in chronological order. He pieced together his career over many years, but during the process, he had a revelation of sorts.

The incidents he was writing about started to show a dark pattern of how the hockey world works. From hazing rituals to injuries, Davis realized that the incidents that took place should have never happened.

'I remembered some of the hazing stuff, and some of the injuries, and some of the mistreatment,' Davis recalled. 'I'd run into guys at weddings and other places, and say 'did this really happen?''

Some of the hazing rituals would take place with a coach only a few feet away, but turning a blind eye to kids abusing other kids for the sake of being part of the team was a tradition.

'When they did those things, I thought of it as a badge of honour, I was happy - everybody does it, we've all been through it. Then you realize the adult who was there to protect you was three seats away, watching a movie and pretending it isn't happening. When I got major concussions and was throwing up all over the bench, the coach sees this, but then sends you out on a power play.'

Davis recalled getting a bad concussion while playing a game in the U.S. At first, the team tried to bring him back to Canada to avoid paying U.S. hospital bills. However, the team trainer insisted he needed to get to a hospital. He spent three days in an ICU, at a Detroit hospital. The team tried to charge his parents for the \$15,000 hospital bill.

After another concussion, he spent the rest of the game laying alone on the floor in the showers rather than getting medical attention.

The rise through the ranks of hockey can be very intimidating for a young player, especially when they are uprooted at a young age and sent to another town to play the sport.

'I was traded while in my math class when I was in Kingston, and took a bus to London and played for my new team that same night,' Davis said. 'I took a bus back to the Soo [Sault Ste. Marie], and woke up in a stranger's house - all within a day of being traded. It's not the glamorous thing that people think. I want people to know what they're putting their kids into. It's hockey culture. You're doing these things from the age of eight and nine, and all the way up, so you get to the point where you're 18 and 19, and it's now normal. It wasn't until I was removed from hockey that I realized this stuff just isn't normal. Hockey is the only sport that people move away at age 15, 16, and 17, and live with strangers, so the coaches and GM's become even more powerful. And you're playing with people that are five or six years older than you.'

As a grown man, now away from the sport, Davis re-examined his time in hockey and realized the incidents of abuse and mistreatment aren't just a normal way to go through life as a young person.

Part of the problem of hockey culture is the 'old boys' network way of doing things. The common thought in many circles is 'we went through it, now it's your turn.'

Davis said one of the problems in hockey, is that when someone is caught doing something nefarious, they will fire the person and replace them, but not replace the culture and attitude that goes along with it. Since the release of the book, he said he's been receiving a lot of messages from former players and others involved in the sport.

?It's brought people together to talk about it,? Davis said. ?It's been a non-stop conversation and people realize they have been mistreated as well. I just want people to talk, and hope it doesn't happen to the next generation.?

Davis volunteers for the Guelph Storm as a player mentor and liaison. If something happens to a player, they can report it to Davis, who can report it to the League independently.

He did say he had many good experiences in hockey, recalling one coach who was the best coach and person he ever played with.

The book, *Conflicted Scars: An Average Player's Journey to the NHL* is available on Amazon and at Indigo.