

BRIAN WISEMAN JOINS CHATHAM SPORT'S HALL OF FAME



Brian Wiseman played his first NHL game at Maple Leaf Gardens on Hockey Night in Canada. His second game was the following night at Joe Louis Arena. For a kid who grew up in Bothwell and Chatham, the stint with the Toronto Maple Leafs couldn't have started much better. Wiseman played only one more game in the National Hockey League, but he has no regrets. His time in the NHL, like his six-year pro career, was short but sweet. "Too many good things happened on my career path to look back on woulda, coulda, shoulda," said Wiseman, 36.

The high-scoring centre will be inducted into the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame on Thursday at the W.I.S.H. Centre. Wiseman now lives in Houston with his wife and two daughters. He works in the oil and gas industry. Before concussions forced him to retire from hockey, Wiseman put up huge numbers for the Chatham Micmacs, the Michigan Wolverines and in the minor leagues. "It was just uncanny what he could do," former Micmacs head coach Wayne Jacklin said. The five-foot-eight Wiseman was a Hobey Baker finalist and an all-American in 1994 at Michigan. He was an MVP and a twotime all-star in the International Hockey League. "He was a special player," Michigan head coach Red Berenson said. "It didn't matter how big or good the other team was. Brian Wiseman found a way to be a factor in the game." When he was a youngster shooting pucks on the road, in his basement or at the rink, Wiseman wasn't thinking about the pros. Sure, he dreamed of playing in the NHL. But it was nothing more than a dream. He played because he loved hockey. "It was fun," he said. "It was nothing more than pure enjoyment." Wiseman learned at a young age how to handle the media spotlight. Interview requests for the scoring whiz came from all over. "I was extremely fortunate - I do believe, some people may not - I had a lot of attention when I was nine and 10 years old," he said. "I scored 413 goals in novice and broke Wayne Gretzky's record apparently." Wiseman continued to pile up points in one junior 'C' season with the Dresden Kings and three junior 'B' seasons in Chatham. He gained 313 points in three seasons with the Micmacs. In 1989-90, he set an Ontario Hockey Association record with 147 points in 40 games. "Brian probably handled it better than anyone else on the team," Jacklin said. "Guys would try to bring up his points and (say to the officials), 'Oh, Brian got an assist.' And Brian didn't want it if he didn't earn it, which was commendable for someone his age."

Wiseman was more than just a points machine. He was a team-first player and a great leader, Jacklin said. If a teammate was forced to run stairs at Memorial Arena as punishment, Wiseman ran as well. He worked hard and expected the same from his teammates. "Once a month, they could run their own practice and guys hated it when Brian got the whistle," Jacklin said. "He was tougher than I was." The historic season helped Wiseman earn a scholarship to Michigan. "I wanted to be a contributor on the team right from the start, and I was confident that I could," he said. He was right. After a 58-point freshman season in 1990-91, he was named the Central Collegiate Hockey Association rookie of the year. The New York Rangers chose him in the 12th round, 257th overall, of the 1991 draft. What made Wiseman so great? "His puck skills, his smarts, his vision, his patience," Berenson said. "A lot of people thought he was a playmaker, but he could also score. He could score as well as anyone in the league." He went to the Frozen Four with the Wolverines in 1992 and '93. As a senior, he

captained them in 1994 to their first CCHA tournament championship. He finished with 248 points, including a school-record 164 assists, in four years at Ann Arbor. Wiseman next conquered the pros: five years in the IHL with the Chicago Wolves and the Houston Aeros, plus one with the St. John's Maple Leafs of the American Hockey League. He played with the Baby Leafs in 1996-97, the same season he was called up to Toronto. "The thing that hurt me the most is he didn't get a real crack at the Leafs," Jacklin said. "... He would have excelled the same way in the NHL, no doubt in my mind at all. He just had that ability to take his game up to the next level." Wiseman always heard critics say he was too small. Then he proved them wrong. "I always said he's six-foot four when he gets the puck," Berenson said. In 1999, he led the IHL in scoring with 109 points, won the MVP award and captured the Turner Cup with Houston. "If you look at how players play the game and how good the players are, you couldn't take your eyes off Wiseman," Berenson said.

Injuries slowed him in 1999- 2000, which proved to be his final season. He returned to Michigan for two seasons as an administrative assistant from 2000-02. Then he spent one with the Dallas Stars as a video coach and another with Princeton University as an assistant.