

Excerpted from *The From Best Game You Can Name*



HOSER'S PROMENADE

Because the E! Cup was such a bright light on the CanRock hockey player's social calendar, we always had more than enough players to fill our tournament roster. This was a good thing considering that Schmiddy -- another 'Star regular-- had passed on the tournament, and Tyson had suffered a rib injury in our first game versus Capsule. T, it seemed, was forever breaking ribs. Or straining his neck, twisting an ankle, pulling a groin. There were few shifts I remember where T wasn't doubled over skating to the bench or tipping his head back in pinch-faced agony. There were even fewer shifts where he wasn't out there minutes later, ringing a shot off the post or smoothly riding out an attacker into the corner.

Once, T found himself on the wrong end of a Jim Cuddy spear. As T tells the story, the singer stood above him and asked, in so many words, whether the point of his stickblade could work in a pinch should he ever require an emergency tracheotomy. T replied, less eloquently, "Fuck off, fuck," and rose to his feet, before striding in heavy drama to the bench. The situation so upset the young defenceman that, before leaving the rink, he threw his equipment and stick into a dumpster, which he later retrieved after bolting upright in the middle of the night, realizing what he'd done.

T was working for the Barenaked Ladies when we first met in the hallways of Maple Leaf Gardens. He was also there the night the Rheos first sang the anthem at MLG-- an occasion which he orchestrated as our band's publicist-- as well as the time we were bounced from the bill a few hours before the game. Though mortified in the moments leading up to our debut, we'd eventually become so blasé about singing that, while soundchecking on the afternoon of our third performance, we goofed around with the team's microphone, bouncing it off our skulls to produce an eerie BOAMMMM that rang around the walls of the old rink. In one of the worst instances of bad timing in our band's history, Steve Stavros, the Leafs owner, was wandering the building entertaining friends, and he witnessed the whole thing. Appalled by our disrespect and embarrassed for our behaviour, he ordered publicist Bob Stellick to find us -- we'd gone for dinner at a local café -- and fire us. When he broke the news to T over the phone, we thought it was a joke. Tyson said that we could still go the game if we wanted, and so we did, sitting in the golds as chanteuse Madonna Tosi -- sensing that it could be her big break in the anthem-singing racket -- delivered a rafter-peeling rendition of "Star Spangled Banner" and "O Canada," her arms thrashing as if Mr. Ziegfeld himself was watching from the bunker.

T was also with me the night that I experienced a hockey epiphany on the throbbing dance floors of New York City. The moment came just after The Rheostatics had finished our set at The Bottom Line, opening for Blue Rodeo, of all people. Even though there were more chairs than

fans -- really, you could have burst through the door waving George Steinbrenner's head on a pike and not bloodied anyone for the emptiness of the club -- our show went pretty well. Still, the gig left us melancholy, but the evening got better once we arrived at a Manhattan apartment belonging to one of T's friends, a record company executive who treated us to a cupboard full of dope and little white pills -- Ecstasy, then regarded as the love drug of the day. Gulping down whatever our hands could hold, we were shepherded in our down jackets, Kodiaks and knitted tuques to The Sound Factory, New York's most happening (and hardest to get into) dance club. After being searched at the door by a dude waving a metal detector who looked like Danny Tartabull in his Yankees warm-up jacket, I was led down a long hallway hanging with black and white photos of men in varying stages of male love. I found myself standing in the coat-check in front of a couple with their tongues reaching down each other's throats -- as far from pickled egg night at the Monarch as possible. Set against this nocturnal tableau, we must have looked terribly awry to the chronically hip Manhattan club goers, though part of me expected to open the next issue of *Details* to discover that Hoser's Promenade was being pegged as the look for next fall. I wondered whether or not our appearance was just wrong enough to be considered avant-garde ("Kodiaks matched with a pair of blue jeans? Those fellows walk the knife's edge!"), but realized that it probably wasn't. We sat on bleachers at the edge of the dance floor while men in bumless chaps and women in brassieres tramped through our snow-boot slush, which had melted into little pools of water, refracting the club's strobes and pinwheels into swords of white light.

Then, the love drug took hold. Not that I felt a sudden pull for the cowboy-booted fellow with the hairy bum, but the X had its effect. I felt a great surge of love, it turned out, for hockey. Within that darkened room squirming with half-dressed bodies, my senses reeled back to McCormick. Suddenly, I saw hockey for the sub-culture that it was -- tribal, fetishistic, Canadian -- a ritual which had been cloaked against much of the outside world, sort of like mumming or falconry. If the crowd at the Sound Factory had been drawn to the club (as I had) with the promise of something wild and strange and secret, I wondered what they would have made of the men and women back home who forced their way through ice-streaked blizzards in search of an even colder place, where they huddled together in rank enclaves that smelled of cabbage, only to remove their clothes in favour of sweat-heavy armour, which they layered across their bodies until, one by one, they hit the ice looking like Yeti hunters. Viewed through the prism of New York's underground, I saw this scene as weird and chimeric, while the Sound Factory's subterranean theatre might well have been torn from the pages of a self-conscious style magazine. The X urged me, "David, make love to your source" (or something equally embarrassing) and as I contemplated the exoticism of my country's game, I found my arms wrapped around the woolen shoulders of my friends, whispering epithets about home into their ears. Had one of those spike-necked fellows prowling the room asked me to check out his chain mail, I probably wouldn't have heard him. I was too busy leaning against T and effusing, "Man, Nik Lidstrom is one sweet defenceman..."

"Boy are you ever high," he said, stepping away.

But it was true.

I was stoned in love with hockey.

Tyson is my main connection to the world of industrial rock and roll, having held down a job as publicist for a handful of big record companies the last few years. Along with Dave Bookman and I, T helped organize the first ever Rockers Play the Classics charity hockey game. We did this in concert with the John Harris Institute (a local music college), who recruited a pair of mainstream Canadian rockers, Andy Curran and Carl Dixon, to help out with the project. As it turned out, we got along worse than Bob Clarke and Bonnie Lindros. During our first get-together to decide which bands would or wouldn't play for the Rockers (the "Classics" were made up of

NHL alumni), these two former members of Coney Hatch lobbed Gowan, Helix, and The Killer Dwarves; we shot back with UIC, Lowest of the Low, the Bourbon Tabernacle Choir. Our list probably sounded as lame to them as theirs did to us, but when Carl asked, "These bands... they're actually, like, gigging bands?" I wanted to rise up and smash his head on the table like an ape to a hairy coconut. Instead, I told them, "These bands are playing in the game. Or we're not."

We reached the weakest of compromises: a unified team. The slags would send out their line, we'd send out ours. Gowan, it turned out, was easily the best player on the ice. Whenever he had the puck -- which was always -- Tyler Stewart of the Barenaked Ladies warned the Oldtimers, "Watch out for that guy, he's a straaange animal!!" The Classics won 24-22, and while I got to play against Paul Henderson, Mike Palmateer and other players from my childhood, what I remember most was the enmity of the experience.

The following year's game was much better. The slags decided to hold their own game in Hamilton, and we held ours. This time we invited whomever we wanted and there was a much better feeling in the Varsity Arena dressing room. During the game, I remember taking the puck in the corner and rushing up the ice, gathering a great head of steam. As I approached the centre line, former Bruins' defenceman Dick Redmond came towards me, but I blew past him. I realize that Dick Redmond will never be mentioned in the same breath as Wes Walz or Sammi Kapanen when it comes to the skating wizards of our time, but still, I was overwhelmed by the feeling that I'd out-manuevered a real live ex-NHLer. Even though I lost the puck while approaching the goal, it was a sensation that lasted for days and weeks, until I was given a tape of the event as a keepsake. I immediately forwarded to my rush, at which point it was revealed that Redmond hadn't tried to stop me, after all. Slowing down the tape, I saw that he just couldn't bring himself to get in the way of such a determined scamp. He'd simply glided towards me, reached out with his stick and waved it in my blazing path. I bashed clean through, racing hellbent and head down to the open lane.

We didn't know it at the time, but the Rockers events were E! Cup prototypes, if less well-run and with far fewer significant musical types. Over the past few years, the star quality of the tournament has increased, having drafted names like Sam Roberts and The Constantines into the hockeyrock ranks. I'd been warned by Gord Downie that Sam Roberts was "probably really good. He's very competitive, so I'd be a little worried." I must say that, upon meeting Sam's team-- The Jokers-- in a must-win round robin game of the '02 Cup, I was impressed with the way Roberts skated. He had quick-ankles, studied stick-to-puck technique and moved in a low crouch, his chin pointed forward in the classic form of a player. Worse, he had a perpetual playoff beard, giving him the look of a warrior who'd just finished one gut-grinding series and welcomed another. But Roberts' was also half the size of Rob Blake's shinpad, and while I'm no Lurch Chara, I knew that if I got him in my sights, I might be able to cream-cheese him along the boards.

The Jokers played us extremely tough. They seemed struck with a "Must beat the Morningstars at all costs!" kind of drive, and the game was a crazy, three-period war. We were ahead by a goal late in the game when two things happened. First, Tyler Stewart found himself in the slot with a clear shot on goal. He raised his stick to shoot, but fanned on the puck while swinging through, at which point he vaulted off his skates like an astronaut hurtling through inner space before landing on the full weight of his brains.

With forty seconds to go, we lined up for a face-off. The arena band -- featuring Chris Murphy of Sloan and the twins from White Cowbell Oklahoma -- played the opening of "Won't Get Fooled Again." While I'm loathe to suggest that the standard 20 second arena sound clip is anything but a sporting event's vibe polluter, the band's repertoire was just the right kind of fanfare. It was one of the few instances where a snippet of loud rock actually made sense, especially considering the nature of the game's skaters. Usually, musical programming in pro rinks is a case of sonic interruptus -- a White Lion chorus bumped against a Shania Twain verse bumped against the intro of "Bad" by U2 -- resulting in one long annoying FrankenSong. But at this moment, A-E-D never sounded better.

After Tyler's pratfall, a series of wild scrambles followed an important face-off in our end. Each time we tried clearing the disc, it was blocked by a Joker defenceman, who put the puck on net. The Joker's last shot of the game came heavy and hard from the point and it hit me square in the stomach, just below my foamy chest plate. It was punted away by my belly, but instead of rebounding down the ice, it sat there like Mel Blanc's singing frog in the cold nothing of our zone. Both teams lunged after it. I made an attempt to join the fray until I realized that my leg was being held from behind. Looking down, I saw the face of Sam Roberts.

It was then that I was presented with a serious moral and ethical dilemma: if I pushed off with the leg that Mr. Roberts had in his grasp, I risked bringing my blade down over the young howler's face, throat and chin. Then again, if I merely submitted, there was a chance The Joker's would turn back and collect the puck, trying for one last shot on goal. Both you and I know what I did. Giving Sam the "Sorry, man, but I hope this doesn't either kill you, destroy your face, sabotage your career, or clip your vocal chords before their time" look of a person for whom succeeding in the E! Cup was far too pathologically important, I pushed off. Sam moved his glove to blunt my swiping scissor as I thwacked at the puck, which sliced over the blueline as time fell to zero on the big red clock.

The story of CanRock remained forever bland.

JIM SCHOENFELD: Joe Crozier was the coach in my rookie year. Before an 11 day road trip out to the coast, Joe told me to bring my guitar. We were fighting for the playoffs and he wanted to keep the guys loose. I remember sitting in the airport playing "Taxi" by Harry Chapin. The guys loved that song. Pretty soon, they were all gathered around the guitar singing, "It was rainin' hard in 'Frisco..." and, because Joe had an eye for things that weren't the norm, he figured that having some monkey bringing his guitar on the road would help the team play better. And it did. A while later, an interviewer in Buffalo asked me if I had any hobbies and I told him that I played guitar. A local disc jockey, Danny Nebrith, read the story and said, "How'd you like to go into a recording studio and make an album?" When you're a kid, everything seems like fun, so I went down, demoed some stuff -- you didn't really need a great voice if you were a Buffalo Sabre in the 70s -- and later on, we brought in some studio musicians and did the record. But I wasn't the only one: Jim Lorentz did a record, Rick Dudley did one, too. We were a young, exciting, wild team, and these albums were a natural extension of that. In the jacket of the record, someone wrote that it was a goal of mine to make an album and appear on the Tonight Show, but that wasn't true. I was twenty-years old and it was fun. Thankfully, nobody owns turntables anymore.

FRED STANFIELD: Schoney was the biggest Beatles fan I've ever seen in my life. He knew every Beatles song written. He and Jimmy Lorentz would bring their guitars up to the room and we'd have a few beers and sing. Big Bert (Gilbert Perrault) was another entertainer, too. He'd been singing his entire life, and when he'd break out his Elvis, people were just in awe. They were floored by this guy, by how good he was.

AL MCDONOUGH: My son Gabe's a musician. We've had a lot of bands stay with us, and when Gabe's on the road, he'll stay with them. They're very supportive of each other. I remember him talking to another band, saying -- "Your CD's great; you guys are gonna be huge!" -- and thinking how different it is from sports, hockey in particular, where kids are always saying to each other: "You suck. Our team's gonna kick your ass." The way it is in music is the way it should be. You shouldn't degrade each other. You should show support to someone who's in the same boat.

GARY GREEN: When I was coaching Washington, a lot of celebrities would drop by: Sinatra, Bruce Springsteen. When Springsteen showed up, I let him and Clarence Clemons into the

dressing room. I went to my office for a while, and when I came back Bruce had dressed Clemens up in Mike Palmateer's mask, pads and goalie gear.

JEFF JACKSON: Al Iafrate was nuts about music. From the second he showed up, you could tell that he was a different dude. Russ Courtnall, Al and I lived together in the Westbury Hotel. Before going to the game, we'd meet in one of our rooms and Al would play this tape really loud on his ghetto blaster-- Morris Day and the Time-- and we'd walk over to the Gardens. Al was always quite paranoid about losing his hair. He'd come into the dressing room, sit down, take off his 'ball cap and immediately throw on his helmet. Then he'd get dressed with his helmet on. Other days, he'd actually wear his helmet in the shower. No one even paid attention cause it was just Al.

JOHN BROPHY: Al was so self-conscious about his baldness that when he took off his helmet for the anthem, he bent down and hid behind Alan Bester, who was a few feet shorter than him. Another time, he jumped up along the boards in a sitting position after getting checked and ran into the spot where the boards met the glass. He fell to the ice hard and his helmet flew off. He was hurt, but he had enough energy left to reach out and put the helmet back on his head before he died.

BUGSY WATSON: Doug Harvey told me a story about Marcel Bonin, the old circus performer who played for the Habs in the 40s. He used to be able to take a bite out of a glass, chew it and swallow it. He was always doing this for the team. One night, on the train, the boys were having a few pops when the Rocket decided that he was going to eat glass, too, just to prove that Bonin wasn't the only one. 'Course, he cut the fuck out of his mouth really bad. Doug was laughing when he told the story, but that was the Rocket. He was crazy enough to try anything.

FRANK MAHOVLICH: I was introduced to music as a kid in Northern Ontario. I was in an orchestra in which I played a string instrument very similar to the Russian balalaika -- a tamburica -- which was Croatian in origin. Duquesne University in Pittsburgh had a tamburica orchestra that used to come to Toronto a lot, but the guys in Schumacher were just as good. My dad had an awful time trying to get me to take lessons -- I always wanted to be out between the snowbanks playing hockey -- but I was glad that I did. I remember it as a very special period in my life. As for art, I was introduced to that while in school. There was a contest for the best painting and I won, but because I was into sports, I didn't really follow it up. I got back into painting once I'd made the NHL, and when McMichael (of the famous Kleinberg gallery) contacted me about patronizing his gallery, I became friends with the Group of Seven painters. AY Jackson would come to the house and AJ Casson spent two weeks every year for ten years at our cottage, painting and hanging around. He'd leave us with a painting each time. We had a lot in common because he had great knowledge and interest in Northern Ontario, near where I was born in Schumacher. When he talked about the Group of Seven going on their famous camping trips, I was familiar with what they'd gone through in the wilderness. We also shared a great interest in gardening. When I was growing up, my mom would do the vegetables, but I took care of the flowers, and Cass shared an enthusiasm for this, too.

YURI BLINOV: Valeri Kharlamov was a deep, soulful person. He loved to sing and play the guitar. His mother was Spanish, so there was always lots of music in his house. It was Valeri's idea to go record shopping in Toronto in 1972. We'd been given 150 dollars spending money during our time in Canada, so we had to invent ways to bring things back. Valeri decided to trade a Soviet banner for records, so we went down to this big store in Toronto (Sam the Record Man), and got to pick out three LPs each. Me, I chose Tom Jones, because he was my favourite. I got to see him perform once in New York, at Madison Square Gardens. At the end of the show, there

was a riot. Everybody was jumping on stage, so I did, too. The day before, the Red Army had played against Team USA on the ice, and the next evening I was standing up there with Tom Jones, going crazy in front of all these people.

TODD HARTJE: In sports, as in life, music is a universal language. One night during my season playing with Sokol Kiev in Russia, we were having a little bit of a blowout at the *basa* -- which is what we called our residence with the team-- because the coaches and managers had all gone home. The players who were left behind invited some of their lady friends over, who had to climb through the window of my room to get in. A party started to happen and the guys wanted some music, so they said: "Benatar! Benatar! Pat Benatar!" Until this point, I'd felt like a fish out of water and was finding it difficult to establish my place within the social rank of the team, but once I put that tape on, things started to change. When the song ended, they'd take the tape and rewind it using their finger or a pencil; it wasn't until later that I realized they were saving batteries by doing this manually. The whole scene brought me right back to Harvard, to dancing at a party with my friends. The Russian dance moves were a bit different and the refreshments were vodka and salty fish, but it was one of those moments that took our friendship to another level. We were all just a bunch of buddies sharing a good time, grooving to Pat Benatar in the middle of the Russian nowhere.

BRAD DALGARNO: With the Islanders, my stall was right next to the stereo. There was a lot of inconsistency in the music, and it was killing me. So I'd go home and make mixed tapes, thinking it through in terms of rhythm and flow, getting some energy going in the room. Darius Kasparitus loved these tapes, but because he'd come from Lithuania, everything was new and exciting. It didn't matter if it was Lionel Richie or Frank Sinatra or Beck: it was all new. One day, he was so excited about something that he ran from the door of the dressing room, almost falling into the stereo. He was shouting: "You've got to hear this music!! It's so amazing!" We were all excited because Darius was excited. He fussed with the machine for awhile and finally got it working. When he pressed play, the music started and it was "Have You Seen the Love Tonight" by Elton John from *The Lion King* soundtrack. It was so not a dressing room song and we told him this in simple terms. He couldn't figure out why we thought it was such a piece of crap. He kept harping: "But it's so good! Listen. It's fantastic!" I think he was crushed that we couldn't get behind it.

JOHN HALLIGAN: Tiny Tim -- who was born Herbert Khaury in Washington Heights -- was a huge fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs. He was a regular whenever the Leafs visited Madison Square Garden in the '60s. His disheveled appearance, falsetto voice, unkempt hair, and shopping bags crammed full of God-knows-what tended to disrupt fans in the side promenade, flush against the dasher boards. After he arrived at a game, a lot of people got up and moved elsewhere.

RICHARD HARRISON: The first time I met Bobby Hull, I was asked to present him with a poem I'd written. At the reception, Bobby already had a little crowd around him when we were introduced. I handed him the poem and he pocketed it right away, looked me in the eye and he said, in that gravelly laugh of his, "Poet, eh? All I know about poetry is Robert Service: 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew.'" And right there he began: "A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon." He stretched out his arm with his fingers that had been busted and healed so many times he couldn't flatten them. He spread them as wide as he could to describe the length of the bar that ran from where we stood out the door and into the hotel corridor. He continued: "The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-time tune..." He paused. "You know this?" Sure, I nodded, and he went on, drawing out the syllables. He dropped lower into the gravel: "Back of the bar in a solo game sat Dangerous Dan McGrew." It was a wonderful moment: Bobby Hull -- whose shot could knock a man off his skates and back into his own goal

-- reciting something immortal from my chosen art form, admitting that he didn't belong in my world as a creator but that something from that world had become part of him.

JAMES DUPLACEY: I'd heard stories that Bobby Hull would sign for every fan that asked him, but I'd never seen it for myself until the 1993 All-Star weekend in Montreal. Following the game, I took a private coach to the evening's gala. My buddy Will, who has made every Styrofoam target used in every All-Star Game skill-shooting competition in every league in every ice hockey rink in every part of the ice hockey world, was with me. Will is different; he's still a fan. So, when he spied Bobby Hull sitting on this bus, he asked the Golden One to sign one of his targets. The Jet, like Moses, took the tablet in his hands, glanced once, chuckled twice then stood up and addressed his congregation, "This looks like Debra's eyes when she wakes up in the morning." Bobby signed the target. He signed it with the methodical deliberateness of an artist creating a masterpiece. He refused to make a single stroke with his pen unless the bus was stopped at a red light or stalled in traffic. It took us thirty minutes to get to our destination and it took Bobby thirty minutes to sign the stranger's autograph.

ERIC ZWEIG: Frank Fredrickson was the captain of the Winnipeg Falcons, Canada's first gold-medal winning Olympic hockey team in 1920. He spoke more like a retired university professor than a retired hockey player. This may or may not have had something to do with the fact that, while teaching hockey at Princeton in the '30s, he walked to work every day with his neighbour, and fellow violinist, Albert Einstein. Winnipeg newspapers reported during his heyday with the Falcons: "If Frank Fredrickson ever decided to embrace the concert platform as a means of livelihood, it is quite on the boards that he would win out." On the night that Lester Patrick signed him to a professional hockey contract, Frank was performing in the grand ballroom of Winnipeg's Fort Garry Hotel, where he was playing violin in a five-piece orchestra. When his troop ship was torpedoed in the First World War, Frank recalled that he "began thinking about what was important to me and went back to my bunk to get my violin." He had his violin with him again on another ocean voyage two years later, when the Winnipeg Falcons were en route to Antwerp for the Olympics. On board the R.M.S. Melita, Frank played the piano in the lounge, and during the trip, the Falcons organized concerts on board that involved Frank and his best friend, Konnie Johannesson, performing a duet on their violins. Falcons' treasurer Bill Fridfinnson wrote that after dinner, "Konnie and Frank are taking their violins to play for an hour in steerage, for the third-class passengers who are not allowed upstairs." This was typical behaviour for the Falcons, who earned as much praise for their sportsmanship in Antwerp as they did for winning the gold medal.

FRANK MAHOVLICH: Art and music have always complimented hockey. It allowed me to focus and relax, to get my mind off of things instead dwelling on them. To be too into something sometimes isn't healthy; you need a diversion. To be able to play an instrument or paint is a great getaway from the pressures of a game. I think that the player gets the same feeling skating down the wing as the artist does filling his canvas.

PAT HICKEY: As a child of the 60s, I had to find my own path to freedom, which, in my case, meant getting out of Brantford. Some people did it by playing the piano or the guitar; others did it on hockey skates. Rock and roll proved to young people that you could see the world and have fun doing it. I studied the words to "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" to see what was in there and what I could learn from it. One of my English teachers spent a month teaching us the inside and outside of "For What It's Worth" by Buffalo Springfield, and by the time I made pro, I followed Neil Young and Jackson Browne and the way they sang about politics, love, divorce, everything. When I was drafted by New York, I saw the city as a way of extending this sense of discovery because so much was happening there every hour of the day. I went to galleries, saw

plays, concerts, a little bit of everything. I remember going to see “Man of La Mancha” on the Wednesday matinee after the morning skate and thinking, “Man, these singers, actors, dancers, musicians are working it. They’re prepared, they’re into it.” Three hours later, I got to stand in front of 17, 000 people and do my thing. The way I viewed it, the rink was my stage and the fans were my audience. The following year, I was eating in a restaurant when a fellow came up and asked if I’d like to join his table, where Margeaux and Muriel Hemingway were sitting. Of course, I accepted, and during dinner, I invited them to come and see me play. They were all giddy and excited about it. The next night, I remember going out for warm up and skating hard across the rink-- I always liked to hit the ice fast-- and seeing the two of them sitting right across from me. That night, I scored two goals and two assists, and realized that maybe having someone famous in the crowd was what I needed to give me that extra boost. Billy Joel was the person I brought in the most. I’d sneak him into the corporate box. His song “Sleeping with the TV on” is about his relationship with me and Mike McEwen and the Rangers. One time, he asked me what a hockey player’s routine was, and I told him: “Our job is to go back to the hotel room, get off your feet, lay down, and fall asleep with the TV on.” I’d never thought of hockey as poetry before, but all you have to do is see it from the other side to know that it is.

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