

The Final Call: Hockey Stories from a Legend in Stripes

By Kerry Fraser

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After almost two thousand games and thirty years of wearing the Stripes, legendary NHL official Fraser dropped his final puck at the end of the 2009/2010 season and relives his colourful career officiating hockey in his candid book.

After thirty years in the NHL, legendary referee Kerry Fraser has decided to hang up his skates and enjoy the game from the other side of the boards. Never shy about offering his opinion, nor afraid to step in and separate an on-ice fight, the diminutive Fraser is without question one of the most respected officials in today's NHL. Fraser entered officiating after recognizing that his size would limit his chances as a player. Over the course of the almost two thousand NHL contests, he has shown himself to be an exemplary referee. In **The Final Call,** Fraser uses the seventy two games he is officiating in his farewell season as the centre piece of his story. He relives candid memories from each city he visits, such as the night he was pulled from the ice by the Boston police after a threat was made that if he skated out for the second period he would be shot. Fraser offers a colourful, behind-the-scenes portrait of our national game, recounting stories of pulling apart enraged 250-lb men in on-ice battles and divulging the politics behind which games are assigned to which refs. Although a referee's job and story may not appear as glamorous as that of a superstar player, it is every bit as entertaining!

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Editorial Review

Review
"Kerry brought tremendous enthusiasm and energy every time he officiated. I was a younger player at the end of Kerry's officiating career but it was very clear to see his passion for what he did and for wanting to be the best he could be every time he took the ice. He always took the time to explain things when it was needed and remained professional at some of the most intense moments. He was fair and accountable, which is all you could ask for from any official, and of course he never had a hair out of place."--Sidney Crosby
"I always felt Kerry understood the psychology of hockey, and was always aware of the intimidation factor that was being presented by the teams or certain players. Kerry had the ability to maintain complete control of the game. I really believe he wanted the players themselves to play the game the way it was meant to be played. With courage, honour, and respect."--Mark Messier
"I always felt comfortable when Kerry Fraser was refereeing a game. He wa

About the Author
KERRY FRASER, born May 30, 1952, in Sarnia, Ontario, is the most senior referee in the National Hockey League. He joined the NHL Officials Association on September 1, 1973, and officiated his first game in the 1980-81 season. He will retire from officiating after the 2009-10 season. Fraser lives in New Jersey.

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The relatively short walk along the rubber mat from the officials' dressing room to the ice at the Wachovia Center, home of the Philadelphia Flyers, seems longer today. The kind word and pat on the back I always receive from Louie, our dressing-room-door attendant, is softer than usual. It has the feel of an affectionate gesture, the kind extended when old friends part company, not knowing when (or if) they'll see each other again.

This is the final day of another regular season, my 30th in the National Hockey League and 34th as a contracted NHL referee. But it's not just another season; this will be my last!

Just two and a half hours from now, the 2009–10 season, and I will be swept out of the building along with the popcorn boxes, empty beer cups, and other refuse the patrons will have discarded. It is difficult for me to comprehend that time has passed so quickly. With each stride, I recall the tremendous excitement of my very first NHL game as a referee.

Thoughts of that night—October 17, 1980, in Denver, as the Colorado Rockies hosted the Minnesota North Stars—fuse with the bittersweet emotion I now feel. My mind spins out of control as I try to connect the dots of all the games between my first and last. I'm overwhelmed for a moment, then reality takes hold and the analytical part of my brain tells me to check these thoughts along with the rising wave of emotion.

The shrill whistle from the lips of John Malandra, the NHL's security representative, clears the way past the Zamboni, where the ice crew and ushers have formed a sort of receiving line or honour guard. Stepping onto the polished floor of my office for the 1,904th time (an NHL record), I feel the buzz of the capacity crowd of 19,536. They are at the ready, poised to erupt in unison when their heroes take to the ice from either dressing room. Competition between the rival groups of partisans had already begun in the pre-game warm-up, the chants of "Let's go, Rangers" being drowned out by the sheer numbers of vocal cords countering with "Let's go, Flyers." So far, it appears that no fights have taken place in the stands. This afternoon's game has

assumed the magnitude of a Game Seven, as the winners will capture the final Eastern Conference playoff spot while the losers will break out their golf clubs earlier than expected.

Depending on the tone that the game takes, I suspect that violence between fans will be a foregone conclusion. (Fortunately, we on-ice officials won't be called on to break it up.) The passion the fans from these two cities feel for their respective teams, and the animosity they demonstrate for each other, whether on the football field, the baseball diamond, or in the hockey arena, runs deep. And hockey fans are a special breed, one that takes team loyalty to a whole different level, especially when it comes to the Flyers and the Rangers.

When this type of energy is generated by the hockey faithful, it spurs athletes and officials alike to reach their peak of performance. I feel the juice running through my soon-to-be-58-year-old-body (considered ancient in this occupation) as I take my first turn around the Wachovia ice. The first lap is always the litmus test as to how my body feels and will respond to the demands that I am about to make on it. Over the course of my career, I've learned to utilize my internal thermometer to gauge the physical and emotional signals my body sends me. When necessary, I use positive self-talk to overcome any deficiencies that I detect, whether it is a lack of energy, heavy legs, aches, pains, or a need for heightened awareness and mental focus. The brain is the strongest muscle I have packed into my diminutive frame. Today, mission control tells me that all systems are go. My blades glide effortlessly over the ice as I fly around the 200-by-85-foot surface with the enthusiasm of a rookie.

Looking at the excited faces on the other side of the glass, I recognize many that are familiar. There are no lingering gazes today, however, as I quickly scan past the masses to find the box where my wife, Kathy, our children, grandchildren, and other family members are located. I catch a glimpse of them standing and waving, cheering on their hero. A tear forms in my eye as I consider the love and pride I feel for each of them—and them for me.

I'm transported back to a magical evening spent last night at our home with Kathy, all of our seven children and their spouses, five grandchildren and other extended family. We are joined by my fellow officials for this game: referee Kelly Sutherland, linesmen Don Henderson and Darren Gibbs, and their wives. It was a casual and relaxed evening, sharing a barbecue, but the love that our family feels for one another was clearly demonstrated and visible to our first-time guests. Throughout the evening, we shared stories and laughter. From time to time, each of the officials would remark on the magnitude of this game and the opportunity we were being given in this final moment of my career. I was presented with beautiful, heartfelt gifts from my family and friends, and I was deeply touched by all the love our home held.

The evening ended at a reasonable hour, all of us knowing full well the importance of the game at three o'clock the next afternoon. The NY Rangers had beaten the Flyers the night before at Madison Square Garden creating a tie for the final playoff spot between the two rival franchises. The entire regular season boiled down to this one last game and had all the makings of a Cinderella story.

Our house overflowed with laughter and music as my brother Rick and our sons Ryan and Matthew played their guitars and sang well past midnight, though by then I had long since retired for the evening. I would sleep restlessly, but my final thought as I dozed off was how blessed I was, not only to have had this magnificent career, but more importantly, the love and devotion of a very special family.

When I awoke, in the still-dark room, on Sunday morning, I realized I had guests with me, ones who hadn't been formally invited yet are always welcome. They came from another place and a previous time in my life. Now that I think of it, they've always been there to guide me.

My father was the first of them, followed by John McCauley, my mentor, former colleague, and NHL director of officiating. They were joined by Chief Dennis Ryan, the NHL's former security representative for the New York Rangers—I knew who he'd be cheering for—and his son-in-law Mikey O'Laughlin, a former security representative for the New Jersey Devils who had succumbed to an horrendous form of cancer, leaving his wife, Mary Katherine, and their young children behind. I felt their presence, and I recognized them. I was startled by it all; I also had the sense that, while their visit was supportive and friendly, it was stirring up emotions that I couldn't allow to carry me away. I had to focus on the task at hand: the game. I pushed them aside in my thoughts and extended an invitation to visit another time.

Then I heard two of our granddaughters, Madyn and baby Daryn, enjoying the morning excitement of waking up in Mama and Papa's house for the first time. It made me smile, but it also reminded me that, as I had been forced to do when I sent the visitors away, I needed to insulate myself from all distractions until after the game. I quickly showered and dressed and told Kathy I was heading off, alone, to Mass—the Feast of Divine Mercy—and that I would see her after the game.

My equipment bag had been packed the night before, and it sat waiting for me at the back door, as did a second duffle bag containing the nine number-two jerseys I would wear that day. I wanted my kids to be able to share this moment with me forever, so I planned on changing in the penalty box during every commercial time out so that I could give each a game-worn jersey. My waiting bags were a common sight for the Fraser family, but on this solemn morning I grabbed them to leave one last time and waved goodbye to Kathy and the kids. At that moment, they stopped what they were doing amid the usual bustle of a weekend morning, their heads popping out from various rooms and activities to wish me good luck. I turned and met the teary eyes of each of them; their sadness began to materialize for me, too. But I had to hold back that flood, so I quickly exited the house.

I went by myself to church, followed by breakfast alone at a local diner, and then off to the rink. As I pulled into the players' parking lot, my phone beeped with a text message that had been sent at 11:34 a.m. It read: "Congratulations to u and your family on an outstanding career! U without question made the game better! Best wishes to u on the next step of life! 99." The peace I had gained at morning Mass was immediately replaced with an adrenaline rush, thanks to that message from Wayne Gretzky.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive currently, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Sure, by reading a publication your ability to survive increase then having chance to remain than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading any book, we give you this kind of The Final Call: Hockey Stories from a Legend in Stripes book as beginning and daily reading reserve. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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