

William Fichtner



Fichtner says: Hockey rocks

Prison Break actor shares his memories of supporting Sabres and Duck watching

THE PAST YEAR has been a hockey renaissance for me. I've been lucky enough to follow Anaheim's Stanley Cup run, write a blog for NHL.com, meet players and attend the All-Star Game and NHL Awards.

That's a ton of tremendous memories for any hockey fan. As someone who has loved the Sabres since they entered the league, there's one thing that could make my hockey experience better, but I'm hopeful GM Lindy Ruff, coach Darcy Regier and Buffalo's players will help in that department in the very near future.

Like a lot of kids, my hockey memories started out in my neighborhood. I went to Maryvale High School in Cheektowaga, N.Y., (just outside of Buffalo) and lived close to a creek. At its widest, the creek was 20 feet; at its thinnest it was maybe 10. But it was long and straight. And this is Buffalo, where there's only two seasons - winter, and the 4th of July - so the creek was almost always frozen over.

That creek is where the older neighborhood kids got together, threw as many clothes as they could on me for extra padding, gave me some baseball equipment, stuffed garbage bags and tied them around my legs, and stuck me in goal. I always ended up as the goalie.

I was never good enough to play in any of the leagues back then, but the local church in our area decided to enter a team in the town league. I thought, "Great!"

So I tried out. I must've been on the ice for 10 minutes when the coach came up and said, "Thank you."

"No, thank you!" I replied. I thought it was a given I'd be their goalie. I couldn't skate, but hey, I could stop pucks.

The coach tried again. "We just want to thank you for your effort," he said.

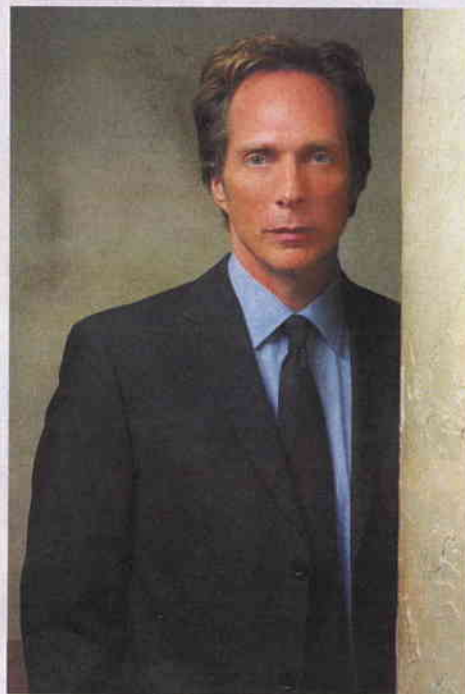
"Well, you're welcome," I said, oblivious to the fact he was saying, "Kid, you're done here."

HOCKEY SCHOOL WAS BIG HELP

That was a shocker, so that summer my mom sent me to hockey school up in St. Catharines, Ont. Marv Edwards from the California Golden Seals was the main guy there; the first four days, we saw no pucks at all. Marv made us work on our skating so we could move properly around the crease. Smart man.

When I got back home, the church already had its team assembled. So the kids on my street, the street next to ours, and a few other kids formed our own team. And we were absolutely the Bad News Bears; even our jerseys didn't match. But soon enough, we won that town league.

The past couple years, work has kept me on the road a lot, making it



CAGED HEAT William Fichtner was a goalie in his youth, but now deals with a different cage on *Prison Break*.

difficult to watch every game. But since I moved to Los Angeles from New York, I'm not far from the Honda Center, so I've been able to see many Ducks games.

Following the Ducks last season was one of the best times I've had as a fan. I always watched the scoreboard to see how the Sabres were doing, but just being there to see Anaheim go all the way was really something I treasure. Of all sports, there is nothing more exciting than the NHL playoffs. Everybody raises their game and it's as thrilling as sports gets.

And what a great evening it was

in Toronto for the NHL Awards. What an honor to be able to present the Calder Trophy. I've still got the envelope with Evgeni Malkin's name on it as the winner. It's got a bit of a "Holy Grail" status for me, so I'm getting that baby framed.

During the presentation, I had no idea what Evgeni looked like and was nervous I wouldn't pronounce his name properly. (I'm sorry, but there were no kids in Cheektowaga named Evgeni.) I must've asked people, "How do you say it?" about two dozen times.

I opened the envelope and there his name is. I told myself, "Don't screw it up," and I think I did OK. Then, I'm looking around to see who's coming to accept the award. This middle-aged guy - who I

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later discover is Michel Therrien, Evgeni's coach in Pittsburgh - starts walking toward the stage.

As he's coming up the steps, all I'm thinking to myself is, "I thought rookies were supposed to be younger."

MORE ICING, PLEASE

It hasn't always been easy being a Sabres fan - especially when they came so close to winning a Cup (cough, Brett Hull). But I lived in the town where the Bills went to four straight Super Bowls and lost every one. After that torture, I couldn't invest all my emotions in my teams. It was just too much.

For me these days, if your team makes the playoffs, it's a little bit of icing on the cake. And every playoff round they win is a little more icing. If you're lucky enough to win it all, you get the sparkler on top of the cake.

Unfortunately, I have yet to see any sparklers in my life. However, I've seen a lot of icing, so I'm a happy guy. But still: Go Sabres go!

- William Fichtner is a renowned actor who stars in Fox's *Prison Break*. His newest film, *The Amateurs*, will be released Nov. 30 in L.A.