



FACE OFF

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Rochester Hockey Community Loses Craig Charron

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Kevin Oklobzija • Staff writer • October 20, 2010

There were the incredible maneuvers with the puck, the moves that enabled Craig Charron to pile up 435 points in nine American Hockey League seasons.

Charron had the ability to stickhandle in a phone booth. Even if someone was on the phone. But as news of Charron's death spread on Tuesday, friends and former Rochester Americans teammates didn't necessarily think about what he did on the ice.

Instead, they remembered his devotion to family, to team and to community. And they remembered his smile. How could they not?

"Every time you run into him he has a smile on his face, a big ear-to-ear grin," Amerks assistant coach Jason Cipolla said on Tuesday afternoon. "You just sense the warmth and friendliness coming off him every time you see him."

Charron lost his battle to cancer at around 3:30 a.m. on Tuesday. He was 42.

Members of his immediate family, wife Wendy and children Jackson, 14; Nicholas, 12; Hunter, 9; Emma, 1,

were at his side in the hospital.

"Wendy was holding his hand and she told him he should go now and he went," said Andy Gross, a former part-owner of the Amerks and one of Charron's closest friends in Rochester.

Diagnosed in late January with an advanced stage of stomach cancer, Charron immediately underwent an aggressive treatment regimen. While there were encouraging moments along the way, the disease finally won.

"He was such an unbelievable husband and father," said Jody Gage, Charron's teammate in 1995-96 and the team's director of hockey operations. "I don't think I ever saw a better stick-handler. He was an unbelievable talent but, more importantly, he was such a great person."

Ray Maluta, who hired Charron as general manager of the Monroe County Sports Centre at MCC two years ago, is convinced Charron's middle name starts with the letter G.

"Give, give, give, give; he was so giving and he was always helping somebody," Maluta said.

Those fond memories helped friends cope on Tuesday.



"He never had an enemy," said San Jose Sharks center Scott Nichol, Charron's teammate in Rochester for three seasons. "And there's a lesson there - maybe that's what he was put on earth for. He touched everybody positively somehow."

Charron's impact in hockey is somewhat amazing, considering

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Rest In Peace, Craig Charron



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Mission Statement

The purpose of this organization will be:

- a. To promote better understanding between Booster Clubs and the American Hockey League Organization.
- b. To Compare and attempt to alleviate problems confronting each individual Booster Club.
- c. To act as a social organization for Booster Club members.

Submitting an Article

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Editor: Bill Walch

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that at every step up the ladder, he was told he'd never make it.

Known as "Sharky" to friends and teammates, he was told he was too small and not good enough to play in high school in North Easton, Mass., yet he led the high school team in scoring as a sophomore, junior and senior.

He then was told he wasn't good enough to play collegiate hockey, yet he earned a scholarship to the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. He will be inducted into the UMass-Lowell hockey hall of fame this weekend.

It took him five years in hockey's lower minor leagues before he ever was given a chance to be an AHL regular. Former Amerks owner Steve Donner and his partner, Gross, signed Charron on their own. In 2008, he was enshrined in the Amerks Hall of Fame.

"He was told all along that he was too small, too this, too that," Gage said. "Even when he came here, he did not have an easy time getting ice time."

Charron grew up in the Boston area but Rochester became his home shortly after his arrival. He and Wendy were raising their family in Spencerport.

"He was a great asset to the city, that's for sure," Gross said. "I'd ask him to come to a little league hockey game and he'd go out on the ice with the kids."

For the previous three winters, Charron coached the Spencerport High School hockey team.

"He really built a family structure within his program and stressed academics," said Spencerport athletic director John Pelin.

"He was a great teacher of fundamentals," Pelin said, "and, for a person who has been at the highest level of his profession, when things come easy to them, sometimes they don't understand how to teach that to others. But he had that knack to teach

to all different skill levels."

Cancer has struck the Charron family in the past. His mother died when he was 14. Cancer also claimed the life of an aunt, the mother of 1980 U.S. Olympic hero Jim Craig, at a young age. Doctors told him there was no connection.

"We have lost one of the ambassadors for hockey in the Rochester area," Cipolla said.

Charron's career-long battle for ice time is still referenced on occasion by his former Amerks teammate and roommate Dane Jackson, now an assistant coach at the University of North Dakota.

"When I'm talking to our guys and things aren't going the way they'd like, I bring up Craig's name and I tell them everybody's got a different path," Jackson said.

"He had to fight for everything he got. He wasn't a draft pick; he came from the lower leagues. But I tell guys, 'In the end, cream always rises to the top. You're going to end up where you deserve.'"

His friends are quite sure heaven is now that place for Charron.

"He'll be coaching everybody from up there," Nichol said.

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