

# Introduction

## *There Is No Ball In Hockey*

**H**ockey has little in common with the other four professional sports in North America. Unlike baseball, football, basketball, and soccer – called football everywhere else in the world – there is no *ball* in hockey. Unless you are a kid growing up in the frozen north, or directed into the sport at a very early age by relatives or close friends, you will not choose to play on the ice with a hard rubber disk that can easily break a bone or knock out teeth instead of on the ground with a round, much friendlier ball.

Hockey players who make the professional leagues get started early. They must make a strong commitment to the game and its traditions well before they are teenagers, making it their primary life focus until they retire. Hockey is more than a game. It is a way of life.

Barry Melrose's hockey career is typical. Barry grew up in a small town in Saskatchewan, Canada, started skating as soon as he could walk, took his first stick to the face at age five, went

through the Canadian junior hockey system, played eight years in the NHL, and coached at all levels before joining ESPN as the most knowledgeable and interesting analyst of the game.

I first met Barry at ESPN in the 1990s when I was working on a pre-Olympic program. It was a warm, summer day. Here came this big, friendly looking guy walking through the lobby in shorts and a polo shirt, wearing flip-flops, his hair in a mullet, with people greeting him, "Hey coach." I got to know Barry.

During the 2011 NHL playoffs, I found myself astonished by the elevated quality of play I was seeing: the crisp passing, the 100-mile-an-hour shots, the size and speed of the players, the solid hits and brilliant plays, the extraordinary goaltending – the overall frenetic pace of the game. Right then, it occurred to me that taking a close look inside this game would be both fascinating and illuminating. I called Barry because I couldn't think of anyone who loves the game more, who knows more about the game, and who can talk about it as eloquently. Barry Melrose is a triple threat – the consummate hockey guy. Proof of that is in this book.

Enjoy.

*Roger Vaughan*

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