

Understand that the league is a systemic organization of hatreds. You might know a lot about the game but you'll know nothing about the league until you accept this. It's true of all of them: the players, the coaches, the general managers, the executives, the agents, and the owners. It goes from the high and mighty, the commissioner and his ilk in their plush Madison Avenue offices, right down to the lowest ranks, the scouts who sit next to me in arenas great and small.

No man is above the blackest animus. Could be a ref you jawed with. Could be your linemate who maybe knows your girlfriend better than he says. Could be the agent who rounds up his cut every time he thinks you're not looking. Could be the massage therapist who rubbed you the wrong way. Could be the goalie farting in the whirlpool when you're next in. If you are or were in the league in any capacity, even for the briefest time, somewhere somebody hopes that the next breath you draw will be your last. And guys won't give up hating you when you're dead. At that point the hate crosses over and they'll draw the

same exquisite satisfaction from your demise that they'd take from raising the Cup.

Hated and Hated By: They should be listed on a hockey card, right below the height, weight, position, and hometown. They're a lot more important than your hometown, that's for sure.

I've got my hates, too—not many, but deeply felt. The number-one slot is reserved for Lavery, the guy who kneed me and shredded my ACL. I think of him when it rains. That's my Arthur, which has me popping Celebrix in the A.M. and hobbling whenever I have to climb two flights of stairs. I'll probably end up with plastic where there's bone, but for now I'll put off the repair work. Once I seize my chance to run Lavery off the road I'll see the surgeon and my conscience will be clear.

Lavery edges out, barely, the agent who somehow managed my finances into complete ruin and gave me nothing more than a well-practised what-can-you-do shrug. He parked my money and all his clients' in blocks of commercial buildings in downtown Pittsburgh, in what he said was a sure winner. Upon the subprime crash, tenants fled in the dark of night, and soon our investments couldn't have been deeper underwater than if we'd thrown our money into a parking lot in suburban Atlantis. Did I mention that my trusted rep bought these properties on "our behalf" from his brother-in-law? I had hopes that the criminal justice system would look after him for screwing me and two dozen other clients, but the courts spat him out. I guess the judge figured that millions earned playing hockey isn't like money socked away from honest toil.

I played with a bunch of names you'd recognize: Gretz, Mess, Mario. I played against all the others who mattered. I didn't last long in the league: 457 career games. One year near the end I got called up from Hartford for a single game and was told I was being sent back down before I untied my skates. You can

buy my rookie card for a nickel. For every league game I played, I played two in the bus leagues. My last four seasons I spent on a European tour—Germany, Switzerland, Russia, and Finland.

One sportswriter tagged me “the Journeyman’s Journeyman,” a pejorative squared. They always said I was “good in the room.” I was just being pragmatic. I wasn’t good enough on the ice to have an attitude. Gifted, I wasn’t. I had to think my way around the ice, and I took the same approach off it. I played in the minors with and against dozens of guys who were better than me but who never played a game in the league or landed a job there after hanging up their skates. Funny how in the minors I felt like a guy apart, like I got inside the league’s door only far enough to get it slammed on the instep of my skate.

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Whoever said no man is an island has never stood in front of a customs officer at Frankfurt International and tried to explain that he lost his passport and his ticket. At that moment I felt as lonely and desolate as a shipwreck-strewn shoal off the Bikini Atoll, and twice as radioactive.

The customs officer, a guy who reads Nietzsche for laughs, took one look at me and pressed a button on his console, presumably reserving the lead-off spot working the waterboard in the EU's interrogation playroom. He didn't need to shine a light in my eyes—he just let it reflect off his shaven pate. The Plexiglas he sat behind muffled his questions. I could barely make out his words, and those behind me could hear only me desperately pleading my case.

"I'm sorry ... I lost it and my ticket too," I told him.

"Canadian," I told him.

"In the Czech Republic," I told him.

"Someone took my computer bag," I told him.

“I’m a scout ... a hockey scout ... not a player, a scout. I work for a professional team, Los Angeles,” I told him.

“No, I’m not American. I’m Canadian. I live in Canada and work for an American company,” I told him.

“I’m a scout ... someone who looks for players,” I told him.

“I went to Stockholm and Prague. No other countries. Eight days. I arrived March 7,” I told him.

“Yes, I know I’m in Germany now. I arrived an hour ago,” I told him.

“I haven’t contacted the Canadian consulate ... This just happened in the airport here, maybe an hour ago,” I told him.

Saint Peter would roll out the red carpet for a war criminal (probably the customs officer’s grandfather) before I’d be allowed to move from Terminal 4 to Terminal 3. Smiling security guards used to hold open the back door at the arenas, never bothering to ask for my league credentials and chasing away any autograph seekers. In those days I was somebody. Now I was being held up while everyone else was asked a couple of questions, quickly checked out, and instantly cleared by the Interpol database.

The officer spoke into a microphone in his lapel and his superior immediately entered the booth through a back door. They talked, turning the volume down lest I pick up a word. If only I’d taken German instead of Spanish in high school—then again, the looks they gave me made me think I was better off not being forewarned of my fate.

I cast a backwards glance despite the risk of fuelling the customs officers’ suspicion that I was out in front of a vast global conspiracy. I saw four scouts from other teams standing in line, but in this, my moment of greatest need, I could take no comfort from the company of my peers. They were glaring at me for the

holdup, not that I had any hope that they'd vouch for me and run the risk of getting dragged into this mess.

Maybe if I'd been a well-known, well-respected veteran hockey man, a scout who was one of the boys, they'd have spoken up for me. That wasn't the case. At the end of my playing days, I'd been the object of ridicule when my life's belongings, my Cup ring even, were put on the auction block. My second life in the game was still an unlikely experiment, a reclamation project. I'd been a scout for not quite two full seasons and this was my first trip to Europe. I was still a few years away from acceptance by the open-minded, and many, maybe most, would never have the time of day for me. My work with the players' association's assistance program for its troubled alums should have helped my standing with the scouts, but it didn't. The guys who have clout in scouting circles generally didn't need help when they were playing or afterward.

I'm not sure who could have bailed me out of this jam in Frankfurt. As my problem escalated into a full-blown international crisis, the guys behind me shuffled over to another customs officer. I knew their faces and names. Anderson was the leader of the little pack. Back in my first week in the league he'd jumped me. I didn't appreciate it, but then again it wasn't me who had to get sewn up in the dressing room. You might still be able to lift my knuckle prints from his formerly fractured orbital bone. Anderson learned the hard way that you should always find out if the rookie you're going to chirp and run is a left-hander.

From the other line Anderson panned the room, but he really only wanted to look at me without drawing attention to himself. For the split second that our eyes made contact, he registered exaggerated amusement and unexaggerated condescension. On the ice, Anderson and two of the others had made more in one

contract than I did in my whole career. His look said: Winners' line over here. What's that make your line?

I stood there for a few awful minutes as the others moved through customs with nary a snag. Anderson even offered a smirk and then said, just loud enough for me to hear but not draw attention to himself, "School's out." My blood pressure shot up and my hands started to shake. In the first-class lounge they were messaging contractors about progress on the additions to their Muskoka estates. Me, I was still standing there, worried that, among other things, my child-support payments might not clear. And, worse, I worried that they'd hook me up to a polygraph and ask me again what I did for a living. Would the arm swing way across the page, catching me not in a lie but in self-doubt about a job I'd been handed unexpectedly? Does it show up as telling the truth if you're talking about living a lie?

Never in my playing days had I been so nervous that I couldn't think straight. I could be counted on to make the right play, the smart play. At this point, though, I made an error that would be replayed forever in *The Worst Plays in Hockey History* should the Frankfurt security video ever land in the hands of a mean-spirited sports-network producer. I reached to my hip and slipped my BlackBerry out of its case.

"Maybe if I call ...," I said and nothing more. At that point red lights started flashing, a buzzer deafened with a white noise, soldiers with guns drawn rushed me, and the area went into lockdown. The BlackBerry was ripped from my hands and I was knocked to the floor, the barrel of an automatic weapon pressed to the back of my head and the heel of a boot cracking my spine.

Before I'd been handed an L.A. clipboard and a windbreaker with the team logo on it, I heard a lot about the fraternity of scouts. I was looking forward to working beside men who shared my love of the game and hoped to be part of a winning team

off the ice. Prostrate on the floor of Frankfurt International, I had my epiphany. I went from disappointment that none of the other scouts had backed me up to anger that Anderson would tell this story over beers on the scouting circuit. And I had plenty of reason to believe that Anderson knew exactly where my passport and ticket were. He was a strong number two to Lavery on my hate list and rising.