

## Theoren Fleury. (b. 1968)

Theo Fleury is no doubt the greatest Metis hockey player to ever come out of Manitoba. He was born June 29, 1968 in Ox Bow, Saskatchewan and raised in Russell, Manitoba. He diminutive forward made up for his five-foot-six, 160 pound size by aggressive play during a remarkable NHL career. He scored 455 goals and added 633 assists in over 1,000 career games with the Calgary Flames, Colorado Avalanche, New York Rangers and Chicago between 1988 and 2003. In addition, he had 34 goals and 45 assists for 79 points in 77 playoff games. He won a Stanley Cup in his rookie season with Calgary and was a member of the Canadian team that won an Olympic gold medal. Fleury is ranked 456th on the all-time NHL scoring list at the beginning of the 2009-10 season. On the ice Theoren Fleury was a winner. He was a major contributor to the 1988 World Junior Championship gold medal with Team Canada in 1988, an IHL title in 1988, the Stanley Cup with Calgary in 1989 and the Olympic Gold medal with Canada in 2002.



Fleury also battled alcoholism through his career. In 2002 he signed a two-year, \$8.5 million contract with the Chicago Blackhawks. Two days prior to the opening of the 2002–03 season, he was suspended by the NHL for violating the terms of the league's substance abuse program. The Blackhawks hired one of his friends, also a recovering alcoholic, to ensure that he attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and abided by the terms of the NHL's aftercare program. Fleury missed the first two months of the season before being reinstated. While out with teammates in January 2003, he was involved in a drunken brawl with bouncers at a strip club in Columbus, Ohio, that left him injured, he had no memory of the night and described it as among the lowest points of his life. He was not suspended, but the incident contributed to a collapse in the standings by the Blackhawks, and they placed him on waivers in March. No team claimed him, and Fleury finished the season with the Blackhawks, recording 12 goals and 21 assists in 54 games. Following the season, in April 2003, he was suspended again by the league for violations of its substance abuse program. The suspension ended his NHL career.

Theo briefly played amateur hockey for the Horse Lake Thunder in 2004-05. Then he was convinced by a friend to move to Northern Ireland to play with the Belfast Giants of the Elite Ice Hockey League (EIHL) for the 2005–06 season. He scored three goals and added four assists and a fight in his first game, against the Edinburgh Capitals. He scored 22 goals and 52 assists in 34 games, as Belfast won the regular season league title. Described as the “most talented” player ever to play in the United Kingdom, Fleury was

named the EIHL's Player of the Year and voted a first team All-Star by the British Ice Hockey Writers Association.



Fleury began training in February 2009 in an attempt to return to the NHL. By August, he petitioned Commissioner Gary Bettman to lift his suspension. He was reinstated on September 10 following a meeting with Bettman, Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly and league doctors. Fleury then accepted a try-out offer from the Calgary Flames. He said he wanted to prove to himself that he could still play at the NHL level. He made his return to the NHL in an exhibition game in Calgary against the New York Islanders on

September 17 on a line with Daymond Langkow and Nigel Dawes. Fleury was met with loud cheers throughout the game, and scored the only goal in a shootout to give the Flames a 5–4 win. Three nights later, he scored a goal and an assist in a 5–2 victory over the Florida Panthers. Fleury played four exhibition games, scoring four points, before being released by the Flames. General Manager Darryl Sutter expressed his pride in Fleury's attempt and commended his effort.

In his recent book (2009) *Playing With Fire: The Highest Highs and Lowest Lows of Theo Fleury* the dust jacket blurb says:

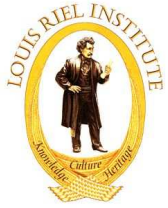
Theo Fleury, at 5'6" made a name for himself in a game played by giants. A star in junior hockey, he became an integral part of the Calgary Flames' Stanley Cup win in 1989. Fleury's talent was such that despite a growing drug habit and erratic, inexplicable behaviour on and off the ice, Wayne Gretzky believed in him. He became a key member of the gold medal-winning men's hockey team at the 2002 Olympics.

The Colorado Avalanche picked up Fleury for the playoffs, and when he signed with the New York Rangers, he was a kid in a candy store. After one season of his next multi-million-dollar deal, this time with the Chicago Blackhawks, Fleury suddenly called it quits and wouldn't explain why.

In *Playing with Fire*, Theo Fleury takes us behind the bench during his glorious days as an NHL player and talks about growing up devastatingly poor and in chaos at home. Dark personal issues haunted him, with drinking, drugs, gambling and girls ultimately derailing his Hall of Fame-calibre career.

In his autobiography, *Playing With Fire*, Fleury also alleged that he was sexually abused by his hockey coach Graham James over a period of two years. While he stated he "doesn't want to become the poster boy for abuse by James", Fleury hoped that speaking out might make it easier for other childhood sexual abuse victims to come forward. He

blamed the abuse for turning him into a “raging, alcoholic lunatic”, and claimed to have placed a loaded gun in his mouth and contemplated suicide in 2004.



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