

## SPORTING LEGENDS: STEVE YZERMAN

**SPORT: ICE HOCKEY**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1983 - 2006**

**Stephen Gregory "Steve" Yzerman** (born May 9, 1965, in Cranbrook, British Columbia is a Canadian-American member of the Hockey Hall of Fame who played his entire National Hockey League (NHL) career with the Detroit Red Wings.

He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2009. Yzerman led the Wings to three Stanley Cup championships (1997, 1998 and 2002; Yzerman also won a 4th Stanley Cup as the Red Wings Vice President of Operations in 2007. 08).



Yzerman was born in Cranbrook, British Columbia, but grew up in Nepean, Ontario (a suburb of Ottawa, now a district in that city) where he attended Bell High School and played for his hometown Nepean Raiders Junior A hockey team. After one season with the Raiders, the Peterborough Petes of the Ontario Hockey League drafted him, and he played center for the Petes from 1981 to 1983.

The 1983 NHL Entry Draft was the first for Mike and Marian Ilitch, who had purchased the Detroit Red Wings in the summer of 1982. Looking to inject some excitement into a once-proud franchise, Jim Devellano, the Red Wings' then-general manager, wanted to draft Pat LaFontaine, who had grown up outside Detroit and played his junior hockey in the area. However, when the New York Islanders took LaFontaine third overall, Devellano settled on Yzerman, drafting him fourth overall.

Yzerman tallied 39 goals and 87 points in his rookie season, and finished second in Calder Trophy (rookie of the year) voting. That season, Yzerman also became the youngest player in an All-Star Game at the age of 18.

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Yzerman's 3 Stanley Cup victories place him among the all-time greats.

On October 7, 1986, Jacques Demers, who was the Red Wings coach at the time, named Yzerman captain of the team, making him the youngest captain in the team's history. Demers said he "wanted a guy with the Red Wings crest tattooed on his chest." The next season, Yzerman led the Wings to their first division title in 23 years.

During the 1988-89 season Yzerman recorded 155 points (65 goals/90 assists), a total that only Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux have surpassed. Yzerman finished third in regular season scoring behind Lemieux and Gretzky, won the Lester B. Pearson Award (MVP as voted by the NHLPA), and was a finalist for the Hart Trophy (MVP as voted by the NHL writers).

When Scotty Bowman took over as coach in 1993, Yzerman initially chafed under Bowman's stern coaching style. Bowman, for his part, felt that Yzerman wasn't concentrating enough on defense; Bowman had long expected his forwards to be good back-checkers as well. Relations between the two became so strained that at one point, the Red Wings seriously considered trading him to the Ottawa Senators. However, Yzerman gradually became a better defender, and is now considered one of the best two-way forwards in the history of the game.

In 1995, Yzerman led Detroit to its first Stanley Cup finals series since 1966, but the Red Wings were swept by the New Jersey Devils. In 1996, Detroit finished with an NHL-record 62 regular season wins, but lost in the Western Conference Finals to the Colorado Avalanche. Yzerman scored perhaps the most memorable goal of his career in the 1996 playoffs, beating St. Louis Blues goalie Jon Casey with a slap shot from the blue line to win the Western Conference Semifinals in double overtime of Game 7.

In 1997, Detroit won its first Stanley Cup in 42 years by sweeping the Philadelphia Flyers. The following year Detroit repeated the feat, sweeping the Washington Capitals. Yzerman earned the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP.

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Yzerman was the youngest and longest-serving captain in the Red Wings history.

Prior to the 1986-87 season at the age of 21, Yzerman was named captain of the Red Wings and continuously served as captain until his retirement two decades later. Yzerman retired as the longest-serving captain of any team in North American major league sports history. Once voted to be the most popular athlete in Detroit sports history, locals often simply refer to Yzerman as "The Captain."

In 2002 Yzerman won an Olympic gold medal as a member of Canada's national hockey team. This makes him one of only three players to win an Olympic gold medal and the Stanley Cup in the same year.

On July 3, 2006, Yzerman officially retired, finishing his career ranked as the sixth all-time leading scorer in NHL history and on September 25, 2006 was named as a team vice president. His jersey #19, was officially retired on January 2, 2007 during a pre-game ceremony at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit.

On June 23, 2009, it was announced that Yzerman will be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. He will be honoured during the November 6-9 induction weekend alongside his former Red Wings teammates Brett Hull and Luc Robitaille.

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### Scott Burton's Final Thought

Steve Yzerman dedicated his entire pro NHL career to the Detroit Red Wings, and became a symbol for Detroit sports in general.

He led from the front, and put his body in harm's way on endless occasions for the cause. A great team player, Yzerman would motivate his team-mates endlessly, spurring them on to greater performances for the team.

His 3 Stanley Cup victories cemented his legacy, and having his \*19 Jersey retired was a great honour for him. He will be remembered for a long time to come.



David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Steve Yzerman gave his all to the Detroit Red Wings – no matter what –