



Tardif knew he'd need a plan for life after hockey. He now owns two car dealerships in the Quebec City area.

## THE GOOD FIGHT

Marc Tardif hasn't let a 'week of disgrace' embitter him toward the game he loves, but it did help inform his opinion on what steps hockey should take going forward **BY MARK CARDWELL**

**M**ARC TARDIF HAS A hard time choosing which shining moment in his illustrious hockey career stands out as his favorite.

You can hardly blame the guy for having to think it over. He won just about every major team trophy he could in his career, taking home a Memorial Cup with the Montreal Jr. Canadiens in 1969, two Stanley Cups with the Montreal Canadiens (1971, 1973) and an Avco Cup with the WHA's Quebec Nordiques in 1977. And it was with the Nordiques where he became the third pro player – after Phil Esposito and Bobby Hull – to score more than 70 goals in a season. He remains the WHA's all-time leading goal-scorer. "There were so many amazing things and great friendships," Tardif said. "It's impossible to pick just one thing."

But Tardif, now a 74-year-old grandfather of seven, has no problem identifying the worst moment in his career: a vicious in-game assault that forever

changed his life as well as his outlook on the game itself.

It happened on April 11, 1976, in the first period of a WHA playoff game between the host Nordiques and the Calgary Cowboys. Tardif, who rang up a career-high 71 goals that year to go with his 77 assists, was suddenly cross-checked by Cowboys enforcer Rick Jodzio. The helmet-less Tardif crashed head-first to the ice. He was knocked out cold.

Jodzio then jumped on Tardif and pummeled his motionless body. Tardif was rushed to hospital with severe head injuries, ending his season and sparking fears the superstar left winger – who many pundits considered to be the most underrated player on the planet – might never return to the game. Jodzio was charged with assault. He was convicted and subsequently fined \$3,000. Both he and Cowboys coach Joe Crozier were also suspended by the WHA.

Less than a week later, Mel Bridgman of the Philadelphia

Flyers violently assaulted Toronto Maple Leafs star blueliner Borje Salming in an NHL game in Toronto. Four Flyers, including Bridgman, were charged criminally for incidents in that game. Charges against Bridgman and Don Saleski were dropped, while Joe Watson and Bob Kelly pleaded guilty to common assault and were fined \$750 and \$200, respectively. Front-page stories in both the *New York Times* and *Sports Illustrated* called it a "week of disgrace" for pro hockey.

Fortunately, Tardif recovered and played another seven years with the Nordiques, suiting up for their final three seasons in the WHA and their first four in the NHL. Upon his NHL return, he averaged 29 goals a season – four more than he did during his first three years as a pro with the Habs in the early 1970s. "I was very lucky," Tardif said. "But I was never really the same. I had less stamina, and I got tired more quickly. And noisy places gave me headaches. Still do."

The incident also soured Tardif on the violence that remains an endemic part of pro hockey in North America. "I can't stand to see fighting," Tardif said. "It was terrible 50 years ago when I played, and it's still going on. I can't believe the NHL Play-

ers' Association continues to accept that. Hockey is the only team sport that allows its players to fight. Fighting should be banned. Period."

He said pro leagues should adopt the no-fighting provisions used in U.S. college hockey and international play. "If you fight, you get suspended," Tardif said. "Simple as that."

But on-ice violence isn't the only area where Tardif sees potential for improvement. Though he welcomes changes such as the elimination of the red line ("it's made games a lot faster"), Tardif believes the NHL should make the move to international-sized ice surfaces. His own first taste of the bigger ice came in the 1974 Summit Series against the Soviet Union, where he suited up for Team Canada alongside, among others, Gordie Howe and future Nordiques teammate J-C Tremblay. For his part, Tremblay walked away impressed with Tardif, who he called "the best player I ever saw with the puck."

Despite his understandable disdain for violence in hockey, Tardif said he still maintains his respect for the sport that earned him fame and fortune in his beloved, hockey-mad Quebec. "Hockey allowed me to have an amazing life," he said. "But it wasn't handed to me. I worked hard, and I'm a very disciplined person. I believe discipline is the key to success. If you want to achieve something, you have to see it and then do what it takes to succeed."

It was a lesson he learned early in life. Tardif was born and raised in a large family in the town of Granby, an hour east of Montreal. His father, Lionel, worked as a milkman, and Marc honed his natural athletic abilities and hockey skills playing in local school leagues on outdoor rinks. "We were very poor," he said. "We didn't have a TV or anything. So, in winter, we were always outside playing hockey."

Tardif attended a strict Marist Brothers-run seminary high school, where his on-ice talent turned heads. At 14, he was recruited to play for College Laval, a private school

in Montreal. Tardif's mother, Rosanne, took a job in a school cafeteria to pay the tuition and boarding fees.

A year later, Canadiens scout and future St. Louis Blues GM Ron Caron drove to Granby and signed a then-15-year-old Tardif to a one-year deal with the Montreal Jr. Canadiens' farm team, the Thetford Mines Canadiens. "I remember when Caron called," Tardif said. "My parents were so proud. And I was happy. The team paid for my room and board, plus I got \$5 a week."

It was in Thetford Mines that Tardif met and played alongside lifelong friends and future NHL stars Rejean Houle and Gilbert Perreault. The trio soon moved up to Montreal with the Jr. Canadiens, where they filled both opposition nets with pucks and seats at the old Montreal Forum with fans on Friday nights for three seasons.

"There were maybe 1,000 people in the stands the first game we played," Tardif said. "But after a couple of months, the place was filled every night. We were 17 or 18, and we were playing in the mecca of hockey with lots of media coverage. It was amazing."

Back then, the Jr. Habs played in the Ontario Hockey Association, which Tardif said had several rugged players and defense-minded teams. At six-foot and 180 pounds, Tardif played hard and never backed down from opponents – once even fighting a tough Oshawa Generals right winger by the name of Terry O'Reilly. "I realized early on that if you didn't take care of yourself and make room for yourself, that if you were scared, it was gonna be tough," Tardif said. "So, I did what I had to do."

After winning the Memorial Cup with the Jr. Canadiens in 1969, Houle and Tardif were picked with the first and second overall selections in that summer's draft by Montreal. "There was no negotiation for the salary," Tardif said. "(Then-Habs GM) Sam Pollock said, 'You get \$7,000. And that was that.'

After a year in the AHL with the Montreal Voyageurs, Tar-

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**Victoriaville and Bobby Orr.**  
The NHL's top scoring combination in 1975.  
When you're heading for the Pros, go through Victoriaville.

**HOCKEY NEWS THIRD ANNUAL WHA AWARDS**

**TOP SHOOTING MARC TARDIF PLAYER OF YEAR**

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**NEWS' AWARDS WINNERS**

**RYON MONTREAL HOCKEY STICKS**

dif won Stanley Cups with the Canadiens in 1971 and '73. At the conclusion of the 1972-73 campaign, he jumped to the WHA, signing a three-year deal with the Los Angeles Sharks for a \$100,000 signing bonus and a salary of \$150,000 a season.

He'd made just \$14,000 in his final NHL season with the Canadiens.

When the Sharks moved to Detroit, then Baltimore, then folded the following year, Tardif followed Houle and Tremblay to the Nordiques. "I signed a 10-

### MARC OF GREATNESS

Tardif became just the third pro player to score 70 goals in a season, joining Phil Esposito and Bobby Hull.

year deal for \$160,000 a year on Dec. 8, 1975," Tardif said. "Yes, it was a lot of money. But never forget one thing, when your career is over, that's it. I always knew that. So, I always saved my money and invested it wisely."

Plagued by injuries and upset that Nords coach Michel Bergeron had relegated him to the second line behind Michel Goulet, Tardif called it a career after the 1982-83 season. That same year, he became a partner at a GM dealership in Quebec's picture-perfect provincial capital. "It was a perfect fit," Tardif said. "I love cars, and I love Quebec City."

He sold the GM dealership in 1990 but immediately regretted the move. "I missed working with people and being involved in the day-to-day operations," he said. "And I was still in my 40s, an age when everyone is still working. So I started looking for opportunities."

In 1992, Tardif bought a Toyota dealership in the Charlesbourg neighborhood, a business he spent \$11 million renovating in 2007. By then, he also owned a Kia dealership in nearby Beauport. Today, he owns and operates the two dealerships with his son, Marc-André.

Tardif says in addition to working, he enjoys golfing and spending time with family and friends. Though he still owns a pair of skates, Tardif said he hasn't been on them for "at least 10 years," and that while he occasionally watches hockey on television, he hasn't been to a live game in years.

"I follow what's going on but not actively," Tardif said. "It's been a long time since I played. But I'm amazed that people still remember. I still get cards and letters almost every week from people telling me how much they enjoyed seeing me play in a game or scoring a goal. That's really nice." **H**