Vocabulary

*Before reading, translate these words.*

Peer

Hockey night in Canada

Jersey

Tuck

Booed

Synonymous

Controversial

Petition (verb)

Press conference

Biography

Wayne Gretzky is considered to be the greatest hockey player of all time. Even his nickname is “the Great One”. He played in the National Hockey League (NHL) for 20 years. In that time, he set many records that have not been broken.

Gretzky was born in Brantford, Ontario on January 26th, 1961. Even from a young age, people noticed that he was a better player than his peers. He started skating when he was two years and 10 months old! He had a great relationship with his parents. His father, Walter Gretzky, taught him (and his friends) how to play hockey. He watched *Hockey Night in Canada* together with his family.

When he was six-years-old, he played with 10-year-olds. The jerseys were too large because they were meant for 10-year-olds. So, Wayne tucked his jersey into his pants on one side. He continued doing this when he got older and became a professional hockey player. He was such a good player as a child, that other parents were jealous of him. He got booed a lot.

He moved to Toronto to play hockey when he was 14. His family thought it would help his career. The Canadian Amateur Hockey Association had to change their rules to allow Gretzky to play. Even though he was 14, the rest of the league consisted of 20-year-olds. He won the rookie of the year in that league.

Next, Gretsky played in the Ontario Major Junior Hockey league. He had to move again, this time to the Northern town of Sault Ste. Marie. He wanted to wear the number 9 because his favorite player, Gordie Howe, wore that number. Unfortunately, a teammate had already claimed the number. Instead, Gretzky wore the number 99. The number 99 became synonymous with Gretzky. It is the only number retired by the NHL. That means, no other player can ever wear that number. He is the only player to have his number retired by the entire league.

Instead of joining the NHL, Gretzky joined the World Hockey Association (WHA) in 1978. The NHL did not allow teams to sign players under 20-years-old. Gretzky was 17 at the time and the WHL allowed teams to sign him.

The WHA folded (shut down) in 1979, but the team that Gretzky played for, the Edmonton Oilers, joined the NHL. With the Edmonton Oilers, he won the Hart Trophy (MVP) eight times in a row. He also won the Art Ross Trophy (most points) seven times. But more importantly, he helped the Oilers win the Stanley Cup, five times. The Stanley Cup is a trophy given to NHL playoff champions.

During his time on the Edmonton Oilers, Gretzky became a Canadian hero. He was a Canadian player on a Canadian team. But, the owner of the Edmonton Oilers was losing money. His other businesses were not doing well. So, he traded Gretzky to Los Angles. It was called, “The Trade.” It was controversial at the time because the Canadian people and Edmonton Oilers fans did not want to let him go. One of Canada’s politicians, Nelson Riis, tried to stop the trade. He petitioned the government to make the trade illegal and block Gretsky from leaving the Oilers. In the press conference to announce the trade, Gretzky cried uncontrollably.

Gretzky went on to play for the LA Kings, St. Louis Blues, and New York Rangers. He set so many records in his time in the league. It would take too long to state them all here, so here is a link to his “unbreakable” records. (<https://thehockeywriters.com/wayne-gretzky-the-great-ones-10-most-unbreakable-records/>)

Since his retirement in 1999, Gretsky remained involved with hockey. He became a part owner of the Pheonix Coyotes where he also served time as the team’s head coach. He has also been the executive director for many Canadian Olympic teams. In 2016, he returned to the Edmonton Oilers as a partner and vice-chairman of the Oilers Entertainment Group.

Questions

1. What is Gretzky’s nickname?
2. What does NHL stand for?
3. Where was he born?
4. When did he start skating?
5. Why did he wear the number 99?
6. Why did he join the WHA instead of the NHL?
7. Which teams did he play for?
8. What is “The Trade” and what was Gretsky’s reaction?
9. Who tried blocking the trade?
10. List some of the records that Gretzky holds.
11. When should children begin playing sports?
12. If you were an Edmonton Oilers fan, how would you react to “The Trade”?
13. If you were really good at a sport, would you want to leave Korea to pursue your career?
14. How important is hockey to Canadians?
15. Why do you think Gretsky is considered one of the Greatest Canadians?