

Sports

Randy Gregg — Oilers harder to Bear

by Mark Spector

Picture this: You're in Business and you hope to be an accountant some day. You take off for a couple of years to some foreign land mainly just to get away from things and see the world before you try to get a real job. While you're there, you work at the local school and offer your services as an assistant. The educational system isn't as good there, and by helping out you can make a couple of bucks as well as not get rusty.

You still with me? Good.

Now you come back. Within two weeks you're working for Price-Waterhouse Chartered Accountants and you're delving into the IBM financial statement for that fiscal year.

That's what happened to Randy Gregg in 1982. But with him it was from a playing coach in Japan, to a defenseman on the soon-to-be-upset Edmonton Oilers.

"I had just gotten back from Japan in April, it was about this time (last Saturday). Glen Sather wanted me to sign a contract.

"He said that it didn't mean that I'd have a spot on the team right away because they were heading into the playoffs and he didn't want to upset the balance of the team. In fact, when he took me into the dressing room to introduce me to the team, he told the rest of the guys exactly that.

"I spent the first game of the (L.A. quarter-final) series in the pressbox. Then Glen felt that the team needed a defensive change for the second game (after a 10-8 loss), so he put me in the lineup."

And from that point on, it's history.

Randy Gregg came to the U of A in 1972, receiving his B.Sc. in 1974 and entering the faculty of Medicine in 1975.

Like almost every other Edmonton-born male, he played community league hockey in the winter and

baseball in the summer.

But Gregg was not just a participant. He was, and is, a winner.

He spent 10 years with this city's top amateur baseball organization, the Edmonton Tigers, and made several trips to Canadian final tournaments, earning MVP honors at one of them. Two years ago, the Tigers retired his jersey, a very rare occurrence at that level of baseball.

But you might not be reading a story like this if it weren't for a couple of Canada West All-Stars who retired from the Golden Bear hockey program the year before Gregg decided that he'd try out for the team. Their names were Ross Barros and Brian Middleton.

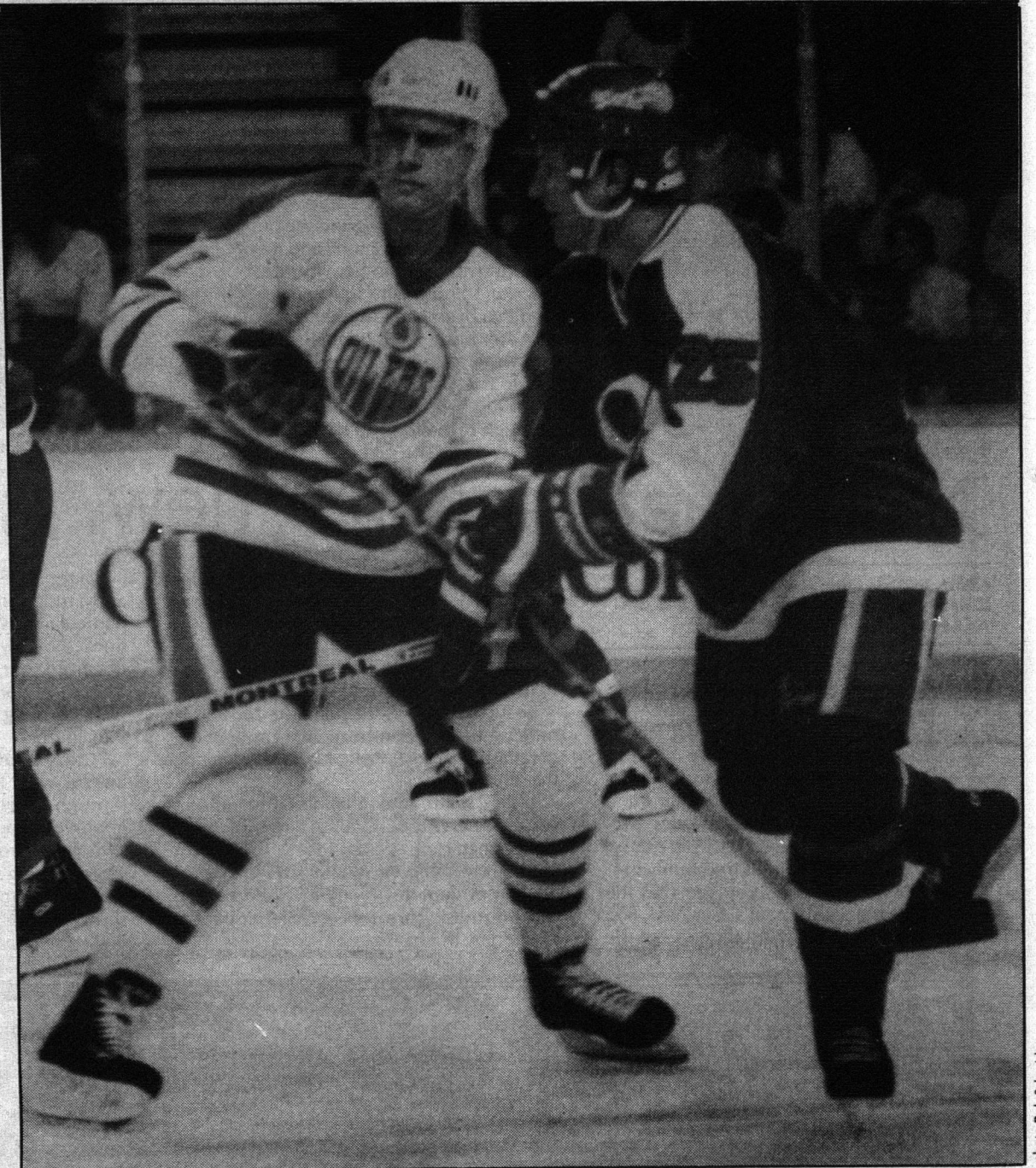
"Those CIAU championships mean every bit as much to me as winning the Stanley Cup does."

"Of course 1975 was my first year of Med school, so I had no intentions of playing hockey. Everybody said that it was impossible to combine the two.

"I went out to three or four practices just so that I'd be able to say that I had practiced with the Golden Bears. I had a coach once when I was a kid who was a third stringer on the Bears. Well, this guy was my idol! It was always a dream of mine to play for the Golden Bears.

"That was the year that Clare Drake had gone on to the World Hockey Association Oilers and the new coach, Leon Abbott, felt that they needed some help on the point. So I made the team."

He would go on to be an Assistant Captain in his second and third years, and a team Captain in his fourth and final year before joining the Olympic program. In his four years of intercollegiate hockey, he scored 94 points in 92 games, leading the Golden Bears to two national titles and three Canada West championships. Gregg was voted



Randy Gregg at work in his NHL business place. The uniform has changed but not the work ethic.

the most outstanding CIAU hockey player in 1978-79.

But it wasn't all a bed of roses for the 6'4", 212 lbs redhead. University life isn't exactly a social experience when you are a top flight hockey player and studying to be a doctor.

"I had a pretty basic routine when I was in school. There wasn't much time for anything else. Classes went from eight to 12 and one to five, and I'd usually have to leave class ten minutes early to make it to practice on time.

"Almost every day, like clockwork, I'd go from practice over to my parents' house for dinner. I was living in a house on the southside at that time and I was a pretty poor cook. By then I was generally so beat that I'd spend the night at the house visiting with my parents. There wasn't that three hours of study time each night, I had to do most of my learning in class.

"Consequently, I wasn't just a note taker in class."

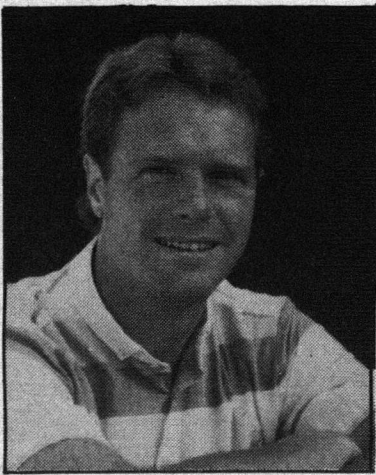
So, as some find out, university life isn't all it's cracked up to be. And for some, the NHL isn't either.

"There's very little sport left in it (pro sport). It's all business."

One couldn't blame Randy Gregg if he had some unrealistic dreams about playing in the National Hockey League. Like many promising youngsters he too had the greenbacks flashed in front of his face by the big guys.

"There were a few phone calls, all right, but there was one that astounded me the most.

"I was in the middle of an Edmonton Tigers meeting at my home and Brownie (Ray Brown) and Gordie (Gerlach) were over, when the phone rang. It was a man named Art Kiminski who was relaying an offer from the New York Rangers. It was a fairly substantial offer, a \$50,000 signing bonus and about \$75 or \$100,000 a year.



"I almost dropped the receiver on the floor."

But the Olympic program beckoned and, with the 1980 Winter Olympics just around the corner, Gregg said thanks, but no thanks. "It was an experience that I'll never forget," said Gregg of the Olympics, and there's no doubt that he won't because that is where he met Canadian speedskater, Kathy Vogt. The two are now married with a

one-year old child.

When he finally did make the step to the NHL, however, he found that he was learning more about the game than just the on-ice part.

"Pro hockey is so much different (than collegiate) — there's very little sport left in it. It's all business. Over the course of an 80 game season, many games are nothing more than a paid job.

"In university, even if someone had offered you money, you wouldn't have taken it anyway. When I went to that game (CIAU title game which this year's Bears won) and saw the spark in the eyes of those kids...

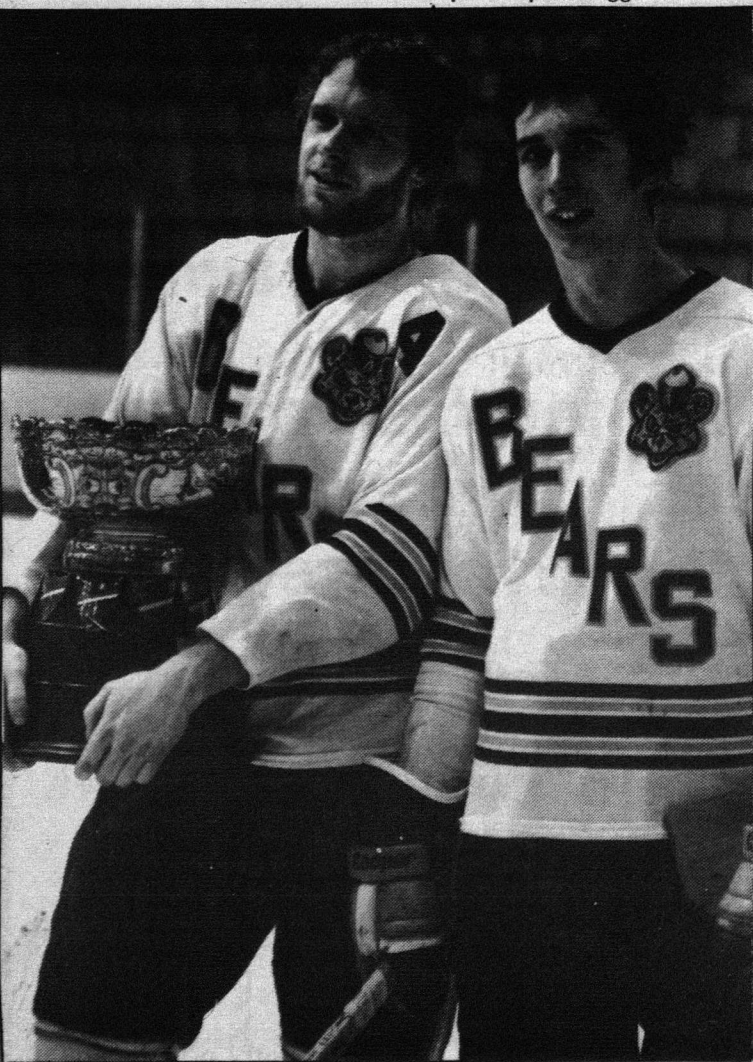
"It brought back lots of good memories."

And Randy Gregg remembers what got him to where he is today. The number of times that he complimented Clare Drake would fill a page of this paper, almost.

By the time he retires to a career as an orthopedic surgeon, Randy Gregg will have enjoyed the most successful hockey career of any of the eight University of Alberta graduates in the NHL, and quite possibly the longest. But no matter how far removed he gets from the Golden Bear program, he'll always remember those years as some of the best of his life.

"Those CIAU championships mean every bit as much (to me) as winning the Stanley Cup does," he said in a way that made you sense that an Edmonton Oiler wasn't really supposed to say that.

But he believes it, as he does with everything he says and does.



Gregg holds the University Cup after the Golden Bears' 1977-78 victory.