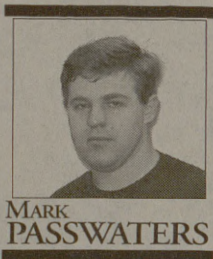


Goodbye Great One

Wayne Gretzky redefined hockey, brought sport into mainstream



MARK PASSWATERS

On April 16, the sporting world lost a player who did more for his game than anyone else in history. That day, Wayne Gretzky skated off the ice in Madison Square Garden for the last time. He left an 18-year career behind him that is defined in one word — great.

Many people talk about how Michael Jordan made the NBA what it now is with his limitless talent. This may be true, but Jordan was able to follow the road that had been paved by people with names of Bird and Johnson but Dr. J. Wayne Gretzky not only brought hockey to prominence but was possibly the sole reason the sport continues to exist.

Gretzky's numbers surpass everyone's who has ever played hockey to the point that it is amusing. Gretzky has more assists than the second closest scorer has points. Nobody, save Gretzky, has ever scored more than 200 points in a single season. The "Great One" did it four times.

This would be comparable to Barry Sanders rushing for 2,000 yards four times or Mark McGwire hitting 70 home runs four times. Gretzky's highest point total for a season was 218, which equates to 2.66 points per game.

If someone were to drive in that many runs in a major-league season, they would drive in 430 runs. The major-league record, 190, was set by Hack Wilson a decade ago and has never been seriously challenged. The NHL should have just given Gretzky the keys to all the teams in the league because he owned them.

In 1988, Gretzky went from being the dominant player in the league to the man that made hockey in America. The Edmonton Oilers traded him to the Los Angeles Kings, and the Kings went from averaging 100 fans per game to selling out for the entire season.

Gretzky was able to generate interest in hockey in places where the sport had been unable to gain a following. In a good portion of the United States, people immediately thought of Rodney Dangerfield's famous line, "I went to a fight and a hockey game broke out" when the NHL was mentioned.

Gretzky, being a magician on skates, was able to show that was not always true. People who were fortunate enough to see Gretzky operate saw a picture of true grace. People were captivated.

When Gretzky was traded to the Kings, there were four NHL teams below the Mason-Dixon line. By next year, there will be a dozen, all of which will have strong fan bases.

The NHL's television contract is 200 percent more lucrative now than it was before Gretzky's arrival in Los Angeles. This is not a coincidence.

The interest in hockey generated by Gretzky's dominance of the NHL not only saved a struggling league but allowed it to flourish in places it was never considered possible. Hockey in Phoenix? Old timers like Maurice Richard and Gordie Howe must be astounded.

At the twilight of his career, Gretzky was still able to make an impact. Reunited with his old friend from Edmonton, Mark Messier, Gretzky was able to make the New York Rangers a power once again.

For a couple of years, old East Coast rivalries were rekindled. Gretzky and Messier made the Rangers strong, while Eric Lindros (the supposed "Next One") and his "Legion of Doom" brought the Philadelphia Flyers back to the forefront.

With Mario Lemieux and Jaromir Jagr making the Pittsburgh Penguins an exciting bunch and Peter Bondra taking the Washington Capitals to the Stanley Cup finals last year, hockey fever gripped the Eastern Seaboard.

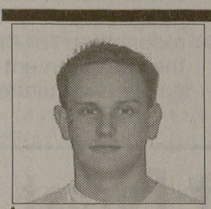
But all of that is done now. The NHL has decided nobody will ever wear the number 99 again, and Gretzky's nickname — "The Great One" — will always be known. Considering his domination of the game and his impact on its fiscal well being, he should be known as "The Greatest One."

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

Bad taste in local commercials offers comic relief between shows



AARON MEIER

In a recent interview, the director of the film *Process of Nature*, Bronwen Hughes, talked about how she got her start in the film industry directing car commercials. While comparisons can be made about the performances of Honda Accord and Ben Affleck, both being too well polished for their own good, at least Hughes didn't have to direct one of the hordes of locally produced commercials.

Everyone with an eight-inch screen and a tin-foil-wrapped antenna can see these things. They are like automobile accidents, no matter how gruesome or bone-chilling, you still have to watch them.

They range from borderline pornography to the downright icky. From statements such as, "You know you want it" to the miles so forced they make the Miss Junior pre-teen, post-diaper Brazos County winner look natural.

While College Station television may not be the spawning ground for the next Steven Spielberg, it looks as though a few future porn directors may claim the B-CS metropolis as their home before too long. Here's a run through of the best of the worst.

- If they gave a Cleo for worst use of sexually suggestive mater-

ial, the tanning commercials would win by a landslide. It opens with a bunch of bikini-clad, "Baywatch" rejects looking suggestively at the camera cooing, "You know you want it ... You know you want the perfect tan."

Then giggles erupt from the camera and a swirl of lotions, ultraviolet bulbs and people who will spend the rest of their lives in a dermatologist's chair having melanomas removed and trying to figure out why their faces bear a strong resemblance to Iggy Pop's leather pants appear.

The idea was apparently so bad, they decided to use it twice. One spot using the bikini brigade and another one with a group of guys oiled up worse than Wayne Newton's hair. (Grade: D, at least it's in focus — most of the time)

- From sexually suggestive to the sexually deviant, the ideas for a local nutrition supplement company and the tanning salons are as different as day and later that day. The commercial gives honest, hard-working Peeping Toms a bad name.
- It stars a boy so skinny, Ally McBeal would be jealous working out with a contraption that looks like it was intended to shoot arrows at Gulliver.
- This Larry Flynt wannabe has an unhealthy obsession with his voluptuous neighbor, who apparently changes into spandex at the exact same time everyday.
- So he watches as the object of his ill-directed lust descends the stairs with a guy that would

make Fabio look like a candidate for the Charles Atlas program. (Grade: F, always give credit where credit is due)

- I always thought child labor had been outlawed, but apparently a local mattress company has found some loophole and the owner has turned to his son, or nephew, or some familial relation and exploited the kid.
- Let's hope his name isn't Marshall Dylan or else the kids at school will be making fun of him for years to come.
- It's almost as bad as those kids for the Tomball dealership who beg viewers to "come see Paw Paw." (Grade: D+, if the kid was forced to do it; F, if he wasn't)
- Finally, Lucas and his coven of special-effects wizards at ILM don't need to worry about the competition from the commercials being made by a local beeper store.
- Using the same technology that made Superman fly and lets Bob French know where the rain in Waco is, a man is blue screened onto a photo of the beeper store.
- As if recording the commercial at the store itself wasn't simple enough, adding the technology makes it seem that much more pathetic. (Grade: C+, at least they don't try and throw perverts into the commercial, although that guy does seem a little too excited about his vibrating pager.)

Aaron Meier is a senior political science major.

MAIL CALL

Letter about Corps contradicts itself

In response to Eric Ferguson's April 26 mail call:

Eric Ferguson's letter is a masterpiece in literary contradiction. As a former member, I am saddened by his misunderstanding of the Corps. I am confused by his lack of organization and obvious double standards.

Ferguson states, "while you were in detention in high school and chasing girls through the halls, I was serving this country, upholding the freedom that has allowed ignorant, narrow-minded individuals such as yourself to even have the right to call yourself an Aggie."

In the next breath he says, "and now I am proud to say that I am a member of this institution that allows me the same right as anyone else. And that is to call myself an Aggie."

What are you saying, Eric? Am I an Aggie because you allow me the freedom to be one, or am I an Aggie because I also am a member of this institution? Would I be an Aggie if you hadn't served in the military?

Ferguson later states, "join the military, grow up and come back and look at this University through the eyes of a mature adult like I have." Oh, I see, look not at the world through your "ignorant, narrow mind," look at it through mine!

Is this your response for all differences of opinion? It's funny that Ferguson begins his article with a futile attempt to somehow tie us together by a "common freedom" but ends up with a slap in freedom's face by offering a guarantee that we will "not see things the same" when seen through his eyes.

Steve Walkup Class of '98

Blame gunmen for Colorado shootings

In response to Caleb McDaniel's April 22 opinion column:

Two young men killed several classmates and one heroic teacher last week in Littleton, Colo. Realize that these gunmen shot those weapons because the guns definitely didn't aim themselves at the victims. Gun control is an extremely important issue, which I do believe is beneficial to society, but only to an extent.

Gun control could not have saved the lives of those children; the Tec-9 semiautomatic handgun used in the killings was illegally acquired. Littleton has a restrictive local statute that makes it illegal to sell or furnish any firearm to a minor. Some of the bombs that day were made from household items, and this could not have been prevented by gun control.

Also, you cannot simply place blame of this incident on "poor parenting." Nearly a year ago, Randy Brown, father of one of the killers, reported the content of his son's Web page, which included detailed bomb descriptions, to the sheriff's department.

I doubt the parents influenced their children to kill; those teenagers fundamentally had the choice not to commit this atrocity. I guarantee that the gunmen knew that what they were doing was terribly wrong, even evil. They had the right to dress, believe and idolize whom they choose. A good parent will first control then, with an older child, attempt to influence such aspects positively, but ultimately the choice is one of free will.

The gunmen who did this are to be held to blame. They alone are to be held accountable for their evil.

The passage I had in mind

when I wrote this was Deuteronomy 24:16.

Erica Milburn Class of '00

Former student thanks Aggies

I want to thank all of the University staff, volunteers, and students for organizing the wonderful 50th Anniversary 1949 Class Reunion this week. The Muster ceremony was very moving and perfect in every respect and the recognition given my class was appreciated by all of us. It is very gratifying to see the high caliber of students at A&M and the outstanding leadership demonstrated by your student leaders.

The honesty and character of your student body was demonstrated to me when I returned home from Muster. A credit card service called to tell me that a student at A&M called them to say they had found one of my credit cards on the campus - I had not even missed the card. The student did not give a name so I want to express my thanks through your newspaper.

I am very proud of being an Aggie and even more so after my experienced the last few days.

Phillip McDaniel Class of '49

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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