

Gerry Leonard

Teammates used to joke that Gerry Leonard only said two words all season: “Hello” when he arrived at training camp, and “Goodbye” when the season ended. That’s how he got the unusual nickname of “Grump”. Despite his “grumpy” demeanor he was one of the hardest working players ever to suit up for the Totems, usually skating on the checking line but also able to move into a slot on one of the scoring lines when necessary.

Born in Edmonton, Leonard was originally signed by the Detroit Red wings. He made his professional debut with the Detroit farm team in Edmonton, making the jump to the professional ranks full-time during the 1957-58 season. The following year he was transferred to Seattle, where the Totems also had a working arrangement with the Red Wings. The newcomer contributed all the way around on the third line (splitting time with Cummy Burton, Marc Boileau and Tom McVie), not only scoring 15 goals but also racking up 109 penalty minutes, helping the Totems to their first of three WHL championships.

A fixture on the Totems throughout the 1960s, Leonard was one of only two players to skate on all three of Seattle’s WHL championship teams (the other being Guyle Fielder). He was the captain of the 1966-67 championship squad, but in a true show of class relinquished the “C” the following season, citing the team’s need for a more vocal leader. The consummate team player, he placed the needs of the club above his own ego.

Known as one of the best defensive forwards in the league, he showed his versatility by moving from line to line and position to position as necessary, even filling in on the blue line when injuries left the Totems short of defensemen. His fore-checking was legendary, and the majority of his goals came from hard work in front of the net. Leonard spent 12 seasons with the Totems from 1958-70, and the durable center missed only 8 games during that span. His best season offensively was in 1961-62, when his 25 goals were the second most on the team behind only Bill MacFarland (who had 46). He played 842 games in a Seattle uniform, the third most all-time by a player from any era. He also cracks the “Seattle All-Time Top 10” in goals scored (8th – 157), assists (5th – 322) and total points (5th – 479).

Despite his value to the Totems, Leonard never received any league awards nor was he ever named a first or second team WHL all-star. He was, however, selected as a member of the WHL all-star squad that faced-off against the Vancouver Canucks prior to the start of the 1960-61 season. Though he never received any official recognition from the league, the Seattle fans always appreciated his efforts and in 1966 the Totems Booster Club named him the team's Most Valuable Player, an honor that likely meant as much to him as any league award.

In a 1962 interview Leonard explained why he was always so intense on the ice: "You've got to hate the other team. You have to, if you want to win. Attitude is 90 percent of the game." His long-time coach Keith Allen couldn't have agreed more, stating that same season: "Give me 15 players like Gerry Leonard and I'll never lose a hockey game." That's high praise coming from arguably the best coach ever to work in Seattle and a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Jeff Obermeyer is a 13-year season ticket holder with the Thunderbirds. His new book, "Hockey in Seattle", chronicles the history of hockey in Seattle from 1915 to the present day. It is available at the souvenir stands or through his website at

<http://www.seattlehockey.net>.