



AHL Team Sites | theahl.com | AHL Partners

HOME TEAM TICKETS & SCHEDULE NEWS & STATS PROMOTIONS COMMUNITY FAN ZONE MULTIMEDIA STORE SPONSORSHIP CONTACT US

Search Grand Rapids Griffins

Like 95k Follow 34.1K followers



GRIFFITI



IT DON'T COME EASY

12/05/2008 10:00 AM
ShareThis New
12/05/2008 10:00 AM -

Defying odds and expectations, Griffins defenseman Tom Galvin has worked hard to overachieve throughout his hockey career.

Story and photo by Mark Newman

Some kids are born to be professional athletes, predestined to be stars in whatever sport they choose to pursue.

For others, it is less than a sure thing. They have to work for every opportunity, every lucky break. In the parlance of Ringo Starr, it don't come easy.

Tom Galvin knows what it's like to be counted out rather than counted on. But he's confounded the experts, forging a career in professional hockey at a level that few, if any, might have predicted.

Certainly no one who saw him in his first Pee Wee B game would have guessed that one day he would be one step away from the NHL.

At the time, Galvin was 12 years old, which meant he was already a couple of steps behind even the late bloomers.

Galvin grew up on the north shore of Long Island, where ice time was expensive and hard to come by. So he played dek hockey, which is a form of street hockey played on foot.

While he managed to learn the fundamentals, he longed to play on ice. His life would forever change when he was recruited by a Pee Wee B coach. "I don't think he had actually seen me play," Galvin recalls. "I think he just needed players."

His first game was in Abe Stark Arena in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens, not far from Shea Stadium, home to the New York Mets baseball team.

He strapped on his skates, thrilled to get his chance to play the game the way it was meant to be played - on ice. There was only one problem: he had no idea how to stop.

"I can't stop and I'm flying all around the place. When I got the puck on my first shift, I just got hammered," he said. "I could see my mom (in the stands) and she was almost in tears because I had been waiting to play ice hockey for so long."

But Galvin was determined. He pulled himself back up and made his way back to the bench.

"Now it's my second shift. I'm back on the ice and I get hammered again," Galvin said. "I'm thinking, 'It's going to be a long year.' I was terrible."

And yet before the game was over, Galvin got his name on the scoresheet, scoring a wraparound goal. It was all the encouragement he needed, although his parents provided plenty of additional support.

The son of a firefighter and nurse, Galvin found that his blue-collar upbringing served him well. "You learned to put in 100 percent effort, keep positive and just hope for the best," he recalled.

His father took him and his brothers, Greg and Mike, skating at 3 a.m. when ice time was less expensive. "I remember him buying some hockey videos, including one with Gordie Howe and his two sons, Mark and Marty," Galvin said.

Young Galvin started taking skating lessons from Barbara Williams, a Long Island native who had worked with the New York Islanders during their Stanley Cup years. "She taught things like speed and agility," Galvin said. "She was an excellent coach."

The nearest rink was 45 minutes away, but it didn't stop his parents, Tom Sr. and Eileen, from making sure that the boys got a chance to play ice hockey. "I think the world of my parents," Galvin said.

Galvin switched from forward to defense when he moved up to Bantam A hockey. He played well and his team won the state championship, which helped build his confidence.

His parents saved enough to send him to prep school. He was a four-year letter winner at Canterbury School in New Milford, Conn., which he hoped would be a stepping stone to Notre Dame.

"I always wanted to go there but didn't think I had the grades," he said. "I just wanted to play Division I."

Following graduation, reality hit. "After my senior year, no schools wanted me," he recalled. "I couldn't believe I had spent four years putting in all this work and then had nothing to show for it."

Quitting, however, was not in his vocabulary. "I've been cut from teams and told I wasn't good enough," Galvin said. "But I never really understood that because I felt I could play."

Determined to show that he was good enough, he went to Waterloo, Iowa, to play in the USHL. By his second year, he was an all-USHL second team selection, finishing as the second-leading scorer among defensemen in the 14-team league.



Search Archive >>

Search input field with Go button

RSS

Browse by Year >>

- 2015
2014
2013
2012
2011
2010
2009
2008
2007
2006
2005
2004
2003
2002
2001

Browse by Month >>

- April 2015
February 2015
December 2014
October 2014
March 2014
January 2014
December 2013
October 2013
March 2013
January 2013
December 2012
October 2012
March 2012
February 2012
December 2011
October 2011
March 2011
January 2011
December 2010
October 2010
March 2010
January 2010
December 2009
October 2009
March 2009
January 2009
December 2008
October 2008
March 2008
January 2008
December 2007
October 2007
March 2007
January 2007
November 2006
October 2006
March 2006
January 2006
December 2005
October 2005
March 2005
February 2005
December 2004
November 2004
October 2004
March 2004
February 2004
November 2003

Notre Dame finally offered the scholarship he wanted so badly.

"When I got an offer to play there, I was so excited – it was the school of my dreams," he said. "As an Irish Catholic, I couldn't believe I was going there. I probably had a smile on my face for almost a year. I was happy, too, because I wanted to make my parents proud, to let them know all the hard work had finally paid off."

Things, however, did not get any easier.

Five games into his collegiate career, he suffered a freak injury in practice. Diving for a puck, he was down when a teammate's skate cut across his forearm. The blade hit an exposed area between Galvin's glove and elbow.

"It was like a Freddy Kreuger movie, blood shooting everywhere," he recalled. "My assistant coach ripped off his jacket to try to stop the bleeding. They rushed me to the hospital in an ambulance."

The laceration severed tendons in Galvin's arm but luckily did no nerve damage. He underwent surgery that night. "It was my 21st birthday and I got 21 shots to numb my arm."

Doctors told him that he would miss 6-8 weeks, but he refused to sit that long. In hindsight, he believes he might have returned too soon – it was a long time before he was back to 100 percent.

Galvin was the Irish's top-scoring defenseman as a sophomore, then played in 39 of Notre Dame's 40 games the following year. As a senior, he was a key member of the veteran defense that helped the school earn its first-ever NCAA tournament berth.

Following Notre Dame, he felt ready to make the next jump. Ah, but once again, it wasn't that easy.

"It seemed like every senior got an NHL contract except for me," he said. "I thought, 'OK, no big deal,' but then I couldn't even get into an American Hockey League camp."

He played a year in the ECHL with the Reading Royals. "I began like sixth or seventh 'D' but I played my way into one of the top spots by the end of the season," Galvin said.

Even so, he was back in the ECHL in 2005-06, playing for the Quad City Mallards until he was traded to the Muskegon Fury in the UHL. "The trade gave my career a second life because I wasn't going anywhere in Quad City," he said. "The move got me into the Grand Rapids camp for a tryout the following year."

Galvin bounced between the Griffins and the Fury, initially playing under professional tryouts. He saw more playing time in Grand Rapids after Kyle Quincey and Jon Insana were injured.

He earned his first standard player's contract midway through 2006-07 but was back to playing under a professional tryout at the beginning of last season. He finally signed a two-year standard contract last January.

"Nothing's ever come easy, which is both good and bad," Galvin said. "Obviously, you feel like, 'C'mon, what's going on?' But it's always eventually come, and you appreciate it that much more when it does."

At his age – he turned 29 on Nov. 2 – Galvin knows the odds of ever playing in the NHL are against him, but he's been counted out more times than he cares to remember.

"The NHL is the ultimate goal," Galvin said. "Obviously I have a long way to go, but anything's possible. Why not set my sights high and try?"

For Galvin, it's all about keeping your nose to the grindstone. He's the epitome of the saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Or, as he puts it, "If you just work hard, life will be alright."

He looks at his parents for inspiration. His mom became a nurse when he was 10 years old. "I remember her reading books and studying while she was cooking dinner."

His father, Thomas Galvin, is head of the FDNY's Bureau of Training, a survivor of the World Trade Center catastrophe and, according to the *New York Daily News*, "an instrumental force in rebuilding the Fire Department."

Galvin's father was at the World Trade Center on 9-11 as a deputy chief. He was an incident commander at the towers, steps away from the Deutsche Building, a secondary skyscraper where two firefighters lost their lives. But many more might have perished if he hadn't pulled his men from the structure.

Galvin was in his dorm room at Notre Dame when he heard the news. Unable to call home due to the lines being flooded with calls, he finally got word from one of his brothers that his dad was alright.

Needless to say, it was a life-changing experience. "My dad lost a lot of friends that day," Galvin said. "I think he lost track of how many funerals he attended."

He saw his parents grow closer. "My dad's taken a lot more vacations with my mom since that day," he said. "Like you do after any tragedy, you learn to appreciate what you have. It definitely gives you some perspective about what's important."

Galvin has a deep respect for firefighters. He has many fond memories of growing up around them, whether it was at picnics in the summer or the firehouse during the holidays.

"My favorite thing was Christmas in the firehouse – it was awesome," he said. "They'd have Santa Claus on a building and they'd have to go rescue Santa because his sleigh went down."

Galvin remembers sliding down the pole, and firehouse pets like the huge dog that he now guesses weighed 250 pounds. "They called him Bear because he was so big. My two brothers and I used to ride him."

He admits that he thinks about becoming a fireman someday, although he is unsure.

"You'd think I'd have a concept of what I wanted to do but I have no idea what I want to do," he said. "Right now I'm just trying to improve my game. Obviously (the NHL) is a long shot but it's still a shot regardless. Anything can happen."

"If the opportunity doesn't come, that OK. I'll have no regrets."

- [October 2003](#)
- [March 2003](#)
- [February 2003](#)
- [January 2003](#)
- [December 2002](#)
- [November 2002](#)
- [October 2002](#)
- [March 2002](#)
- [February 2002](#)
- [January 2002](#)
- [December 2001](#)
- [November 2001](#)
- [October 2001](#)

 [Back to index...](#)













Facebook social plugin

