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A photograph of a hockey player's stick and glove lying on the ice. The stick is dark and worn, with a red and white CCM logo on the blade. The glove is red and white with blue and orange stripes on the wrist. The background is a blurred view of the ice rink and the stands.

AFTER THE STANLEY CUP

**NHL LEGEND FINDS A NEW HOME -
AND GOLF CAREER - IN THE DESERT**

BY BRUCE DOWBIGGIN

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It's the spring of 1999 and the NHL playoff series between the St. Louis Blues and Phoenix Coyotes has come down to Game 7 in the stifling heat of the desert. Exhausted players on both sides practice one last time the day before the big game, trying to summon the energy and commitment they need for the contest.

All the players, that is, except for the Blues' star goalie Grant Fuhr. The future Hall of Famer is not on the ice with his teammates. Instead, he's teeing it up on a nearby course with golf great Phil Mickelson.

"That was my way of relaxing," Fuhr recalls. "I did the same thing when I was in Edmonton. It was Game 7; there wasn't much you could do but relax. I wasn't worried about what they were thinking."

Sure enough, Fuhr shut out the Coyotes through three periods and overtime until the Blues' Pierre Turgeon scored to win the series for St. Louis after 78 tension-filled minutes.

Golf is as much in the blood as hockey for the NHL Hall of Fame goalie. Even as he starred for Edmonton, St. Louis and four other NHL clubs, Fuhr attempted to qualify for the Canadian Tour in the summers off the ice. Now he's trying to qualify for Champions Tour events such as the Shaw Charity Classic held in Calgary.

Fuhr's love for golf can be traced to his late father Bob, who introduced Grant to golf in his teens in Spruce Grove, Alberta. From his junior days playing courses such as Royal Colwood in Victoria until today, when he's played almost all the great layouts in North America, golf has been an outlet for his

intense competitive drive.

"When the Edmonton Oilers wouldn't let me play other sports in the summer, I turned to golf," Fuhr says. "That allowed me to be competitive with my mind for four or five hours a day. It kept me sharp for the concentration and focus you need to play goalie in the NHL."

He's also been a regular on the golf celebrity tours alongside other greats of sports and entertainment. "I have gotten to know a lot of great athletes from other sports by playing these events," he says. "Guys like Charles Barkley, Jim McMahon, Jerry Rice and Tony Romo. Plus I've met a lot of the actors from Hollywood who like to play as well."

Since leaving NHL goalie coaching in Phoenix, Fuhr has settled in the Palm Springs, California area, indulging his passion for the sport as Director of Golf at Desert Dunes, the only Robert Trent Jones Jr. layout in the valley. In the winter, when the snow birds head south, the Palm Springs area is almost a Canadian enclave, especially for those from the Western provinces. It was Canadians who helped the region through the U.S. financial crisis of 2008, supporting the golf clubs and tourist industry when other sources of income dried up.

Seeing the enthusiasm for Palm Springs among their countrymen, four Canadians (Michael Chiapetta, Mike Nyhuis, Glen Brayshaw and Sean Runnells) purchased Desert Dunes in an effort to create a golf Mecca for snow birds. (They hope to have a condominium development break ground this fall.) Looking for a figure who could attract these snow birds, Fuhr was their natural choice. Now, 60 to 65 percent of the winter players



at Desert Dunes are Canadian.

The chance to merge his love for golf with learning the business was irresistible to Fuhr in a location that boasts over 300 days of sunshine per year. He's involved in everything from promoting the club to running the pro shop to improvements in the 6,876-yard (from the tips) track.

"We're now learning the golf business from scratch," he says, looking out at the imposing Mount San Jacinto that towers over the valley. "I find it interesting; at the same time it's occasionally overwhelming. The guys I work with here, they go to school for turf care or pro shop management – they've studied for it. Myself, I just go by what would I like in a golf club."

Since joining Desert Dunes in 2013, it's been a whirlwind of learning for Fuhr. "I knew something about the marketing side from other places where I've had memberships. But learning about the grasses, what works and where to plant it has been a new experience. It's given me a whole new appreciation of what it takes to run a course like this on a day-to-day basis."

For a time, Desert Dunes hosted a Canadian Tour event (before the PGA Tour took over and focused on Canadian venues). The course record of 63 is co-held by Canadian Adam Hadwin, who notched his mark during one such tournament at the facility. Despite the absence of the big tours, Canadians playing Desert Dunes can still see a number of players from the mini-tours and athletes from other sports at the course.

Located just north of Interstate 10 in Desert Springs, Desert Dunes is a rolling, challenging layout where the fickle winds of

the Coachella Valley are as much a part of the challenge as Jones Jr.'s testing track (73.8 rating for men/ 75.9 for women). According to Fuhr, it presents a hybrid of options not often seen in the Valley.

"You can flight the ball high or you can play it along the ground in a true links style," he says. "You can play in a 90 kilometre an hour wind, because it's set up for you to play the ground game. There aren't many courses around here that allow that many options. If you don't have a good short game you're not going to score here. The greens are subtle and they're on the smallish side. If you don't approach them from the right direction you're going to roll off. They're set on some funny angles."

Asked his favorite holes on the course, Fuhr picks the 181-yard No. 8 as his favorite par-3. "You have water running down the entire side of it. And when the wind is blowing, you have to start the ball over the water to have a chance at landing on the green."

The 530-yard No. 16 is his choice as a par 5. "You have to play in over top of the lake." And No.18 rates highest as a par-4. "It's a real meat-and-potatoes par-4. The approach to the green is very tricky if you're not careful."

The best time to play Desert Dunes, says Fuhr, is just before the course is over-seeded in September and then from April to May, but Canadians flock there all year long.

"Our greens are good year-round and the course plays fast and hard in July. But nobody tears up this course, nobody," he says.

That includes Fuhr himself, who's recently had his long-troublesome knee replaced after years of pain. "It's nice being able to swing with two legs again," he laughs.

