

Curtis Joseph visits Alder Recreation Centre for book signing



Written By JASEN OBERMEYER

Curtis Joseph, former NHL goalie and one of the Toronto Maple Leafs' most famous players, was at the Alder Recreation Centre on Tuesday, Oct. 30, as part of his cross-Canada book tour to sign his newly published memoir.

Part of the proceeds from book sales went to the Orangeville Wolves' special needs hockey team. The book, *‘Cujo: The Untold Story of My Life On and Off the Ice,’* written with Kirstie McLellan Day, details Joseph's rough upbringing, being raised in East Gwillimbury, to stardom in the NHL. The signing event was organized through BookLore.

Joseph was given up for adoption shortly after birth as he was born to unmarried teenage parents. Growing up in a home for mentally ill patients run by his adoptive parents, his adoptive mother struggled with addiction, which led to his severe neglect.

In an interview with the Citizen, Joseph said he wrote the book to inspire others.

‘To reveal your childhood and all of that stuff that comes with it is always a big decision. In the end, I wanted to share my story, hopefully to help other kids who are adopted, or didn't feel that love growing up, or didn't play triple-A hockey,’ said Joseph.

Despite his rough upbringing, Joseph said he wouldn't change a thing.

‘It made me who I am. It made me appreciate everything that I was able to achieve in life,’ said Joseph adding that it gave him the drive to be successful. *‘I wanted something better for my life. I wanted something better all the time.’*

Along with his early life, Joseph had a rather unorthodox start into hockey, not getting into it until he was 10, an age when most children are far along in organized hockey. He said he had more of a *‘sports mentality’* than a goalie one growing up, and loved watching hockey.

‘It was such a far-fetched world to me, it was almost make-believe,’ said Joseph.

Joseph was not drafted into the NHL. He signed as a free agent by the St. Louis Blues in 1989. The man affectionately known as Cujo played for the Blues, Edmonton Oilers, Toronto Maple Leafs, Detroit Red Wings, Phoenix Coyotes, and Calgary Flames for 19 seasons.

"If you don't get drafted, you still have opportunities, you still have a chance. It's not the end of the world, you just keep improving, you keep working on your craft, if you love to play, you make it work," said Joseph.

Despite never winning the Stanley Cup, Cujo is often considered one of the best goalies of all time. He is sixth overall in games played (943), fifth overall in wins (454), and sixth in saves (24,279). He was also the first goaltender to have 30 or more wins in a regular season for five different teams, was awarded the King Clancy Memorial Trophy, and won a gold medal with Team Canada at the 2002 Winter Olympics.

During Joseph's time, he faced off against some of hockey's all time greats, including Joe Sakic, Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, Mario Lemieux, and Teemu Selanne. He explained that he developed a "different mindset" to every game, arena, and team to gain a victory.

Though he played for several teams, Cujo is most well-known for his time with the Maple Leafs, which he said was a dream come true.

"The excitement, it's like being on Broadway, Joseph described. "In hockey, there's nothing better, it's the epitome."

Despite only playing with the team for four seasons from 1998-2002, he is regularly regarded as one of the Leafs' most popular and well-known players, along with Doug Gilmour, Wendel Clark, and Mats Sundin.

"You have a great appreciation for the fans and Leafs Nation. It was fantastic."

He fondly remembers Leafs fans cheering to change the momentum, or when a big save was made, and chanting "Cujo!" "You almost want to take a bow."

Joseph continued the team's renewed success found in the early 1990's. He played a key role in the team reaching the Eastern Conference Finals in 1999 and 2002. He attributes this success to the team's management and players, as they had great camaraderie, said they were highly motivated, and took pride no matter what they did.

"Whether they were a fourth line, or a fighter, or Mats Sundin, we knew that winning in Toronto was special."

Cujo noted his love for the playoffs, because the stakes were high, everyone tightened up, and everything mattered. "The feeling of accomplishment you have when you close out a series, and shaking the hand of your competitor, there's no better feeling."

He re-joined the Leafs for his final season in 2008-09, and though he admitted it was tough being the backup goalie, he was still popular with the fans.

One of his most memorable moments was on March 24, 2009, when the Leafs were facing the Washington Capitals, and the team's starting goaltender Martin Gerber was ejected for protesting a late tying goal. Joseph stepped in between the pipes for overtime and then shootout, where he eventually faced superstar Alex Ovechkin.

"I remember staring down, and we had one goal already, and if I stopped Ovechkin, we were going to win that game."

"I looked around, took the whole moment in, knew this could be my last game ever. It was like riding off into the sunset. I looked down and said "I'm going to stop this guy."

Cujo did, and the Leafs won the game, which was one of his last career wins.

"It really was a special moment."

Asked what he is most proud of accomplishing when looking back on his career, Joseph simply responded, "Every stop along the way of my career, I have so many memorable friends, teammates, and experiences."

He added it is important to give back and support local hockey teams, and started Cujo's Kids, which placed children with illnesses in a luxury suite at a Leafs game, because of his upbringing.

"I was one of those local kids. I never had my own equipment."

Only the book with a booklore sticker on it was signed at the event