

The Career Of Bryce Salvador:

Untold stories of the former New Jersey Devils Captain, his path to the NHL and his current role as hockey analyst.

By Kyle Cannillo

Bryce Salvador's hockey career has never had a dull moment.

Over the course of 14 NHL seasons, Salvador played in nearly 800 games for the St. Louis Blues and New Jersey Devils. His best hockey came in 2012 during the Devils' historic playoff run to the Stanley Cup Final. His efforts and leadership awarded him with one of hockey's most prestigious honors: captain.

"Every kid who aspires to play in the National Hockey League, dreams of becoming a captain," Salvador said. "It validated all the sacrifices, tears, effort and the adversity throughout my life to play the game that I love."

Salvador's path to the NHL was filled with ups and downs. He was drafted in the sixth round by the Tampa Bay Lightning but never signed with the franchise. In order to pay off another year of his schooling, Salvador elected to return to junior hockey for a fifth season.

"The mentality, even in juniors, was to make sure you are getting an education," he said. "Very few players thought the NHL was a realistic goal. Tampa Bay basically told me 'go to school.'"

At the age of 20, Salvador signed a two-way contract with the Blues as a free agent. He played nearly three seasons in the minors with the Worcester IceCats, waiting to hear his name called up to the big club. It never came.

"It was a gamble," he said. "Once you sign a professional contract you forfeit your schooling. My first contract was 40k a year. I never got called-up so I spent three years in the minors not really thinking I had a chance."



The former stay-at-home defender got his chance in his fourth season of professional hockey. He had made the Blues and ended up playing seven seasons for the franchise before being traded to New Jersey. The destination opened up brand new opportunities.

It was a perfect fit.

“The Devils were known for being a defensive-minded team,” Salvador said. “That’s how I played and that’s what I was known for. I was excited to go to a team and market that played the style of hockey that I played.”

Salvador missed the entire 2010-11 season battling a concussion. There was uncertainty surrounding his career. He considered hanging up the skates.

However in 2011-12, Salvador had a comeback to remember. The veteran was playing the best hockey of his career and was an instrumental piece of the Devils' Cinderella playoff run. They won three rounds including beating their rivals and the league-leading New York Rangers. Just like that, they found themselves playing for the most coveted trophy in hockey: The Stanley Cup.

“It was a memorable year from the start,” Salvador said. “To experience a Stanley Cup run was a blessing. 12 months prior, I wasn’t sure if I was going to ever play again. It was surreal.”



The next season, he was named captain. The general manager at the time, Lou Lamoriello went into the locker room to formally address the team and name Salvador as the 10th captain of the franchise. He was just the third black captain in NHL history.

“I reflected back on the nine previous captains and to have your name associated with those guys, it was humbling,” Salvador said. “It was quite the honor and in that moment, you don’t realize that it’s actually happening.”

“It’s not common to have a captain like myself. I was a defensive-defenseman. I wasn’t going to change the game offensively. It hit me that the organization respected what I brought. My character, my work ethic and my commitment to the franchise were being recognized.”



Throughout Salvador's career, hockey was more than just a game. It was his way of life. Off the ice, Salvador made it his goal to give back to others by coaching youth hockey, growing the game, or donating to charity.

"So many people helped me along the way to reach my dream," he said. "If I can help a kid who is aspiring to reach their goals, I'd like to pay it back. You never know what you can say that might positively impact someone's life."

On Sept. 2 2015, Salvador retired from hockey. For years, he was so used to being in the limelight of thousands of hockey fans, but a sudden halt was a shocking experience. No routine. No structure. "No purpose".

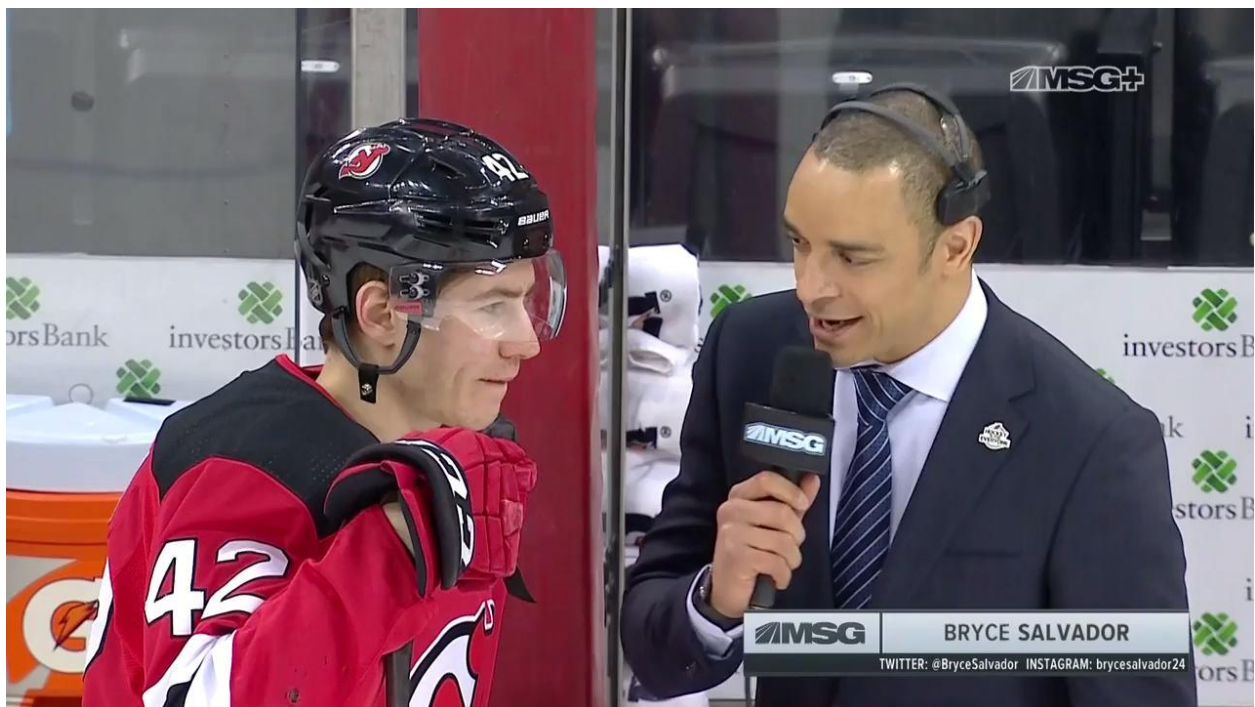
During his adjustment period, he spent time with his family and stayed involved in youth hockey with his two sons.

In 2017, an analyst position opened with the Devils MSG Networks television crew. On social media, a fan made a comment that Salvador should apply for the position. It was not the route Salvador expected to go down, but he gave a phone call to a Devils executive to feel out the job responsibility.

“The stars aligned,” he said. “Where there was smoke, there was fire. The same day that I called to inquire about the position, they were about to call me for an interview.”

“When I spoke to executives at MSG, it was my first time being interviewed for anything,” he said. “I just was shooting the breeze and then halfway through it, I was like, wait this is an interview. I was bombing it!”

He eventually got the job, and has been in the role ever since. Salvador believes he provides value to the telecast by breaking down the key elements of the game in more detail.



“Hockey is going in this analytical and stat direction. Between gambling and fantasy sports, fans want this information. We are in the infancy stages of this and we can provide fans with new information to help them better understand the game.”

“I’m never going to leave the environment of hockey,” Salvador said. “I am going to be involved in some fashion. It is something that I have just come to understand. I am blessed that hockey will be there forever.”

Salvador isn't the same without hockey and hockey isn't the same without him.