

January 30, 2013

To the Members of the Hockey Hall of Fame Selection Committee:

I am writing this letter to support the induction of Reggie Leach, a member of Berens River First Nation into the Hockey Hall of Fame. Hockey is a sport that is held close to the heart for many First Nations people. In my nation, hockey is the younger sibling of baagaataa'awe or lacrosse and our children and youth are involved in the sport both through minor hockey, Aboriginal hockey programs, and by simply going out onto the lake in boots or on borrowed skates and just playing.

Reggie Leach was born in 1950. Growing up as a First Nations person in the 1950s and 1960s was difficult. First nations people were not able to practice their ceremonies, hire a lawyer or organize politically until 1958. First Nations people did not have the right to vote in Canada until 1960. Through the 1970s and 1980s Native people faced tremendous racism and discrimination, often in addition to living in conditions of poverty. None of these barriers stopped Leach – he was not only able to overcome these obstacles, but he was able to carry himself forward to become the highest caliber of athlete. He was able to obtain excellence.

Leach has continued his commitment to the sport of hockey and to Aboriginal communities. He is a regular participant and supporter of Aboriginal youth hockey tournaments, clinics and workshops. He is an inspiring speaker for our youth. He has also started a hockey school along with his son Jamie Leach, who played for the Pittsburgh Penguins in the early 1990s, and the two hope to bring the school to First Nation youth in Canada. Milton Tootoosis, the president of Oskana Minor Hockey Development Inc. says "Reggie is a great role model. He's a great guy for giving back to the community and we all appreciate that."

Leach is a role model for our young people not only because he was an outstanding hockey player committed to giving back to our communities but also because he has overcome addiction. Aboriginal communities continually battle against substance abuse as our people search for ways to cope with ongoing and historic trauma. Leach talks openly about the negative ways alcohol impacted his life and career. He honestly shares a pathway to a different life – these are the kinds of stories Aboriginal youth need to hear.

My son plays both lacrosse and soccer in our town and is an avid hockey fan. For his ninth birthday, his dream was to go to the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. While we visited the exhibits he carried with him a list of First Nations, Métis and Inuit players. We found several NHL players with Aboriginal ancestry on the Stanley Cup, including George Armstrong (Toronto Maple Leafs), Theo Fleury (Flames), Bryan Trottier, Chris Simon (Colorado Avalanche), and of course Reggie Leach with the Philadelphia Flyers. He asked me why we had to search so hard for our contribution. I had no answer.

Our children and youth need to see themselves, their realities and their stories reflected back to them in a positive way. This mirroring shows our youth that they too can dream and achieve and contribute to their communities and broader society. It places their experiences in a historical context enabling them to be inspired and challenged by the generation that has gone before them. Reggie Leach and his story of

persistence, commitment and success in the sport of hockey is one of those examples. His story dazzles our children's eyes. Reggie Leach is our hero.

In writing this, I ask that you give the submission package for the induction of Reggie Leach into the Hockey Hall of Fame your full attention. This induction would not only have tremendous meaning for Leach, his fans and Aboriginal People all over Canada, but it would inspire a new generation of Indigenous athletes to strive for excellence and to persist despite the barriers they face. Reggie Leach is one of our heroes – please recognize him in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Your Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSimpson'.

Leanne Simpson, (Anishinaabe), Ph.D.
Member of Alderville First Nation
Conjunct Faculty, Indigenous Studies PhD Program