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Top Shelf: Belanger helping players move with ease



In 248 NHL games with the Leafs, Islanders, Bruins and Kings, Ken Belanger had 11 goals and 23 points to go with 695 penalty minutes. (Photo by Brian Bahr/Getty Images)



Ryan Dixon
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Everything about Ken Belanger's frame suggests he's a great candidate to move a house.

After all, the former NHL pugilist stands 6-foot-4 and 200 pounds, affording him the kind of look that makes you think he could move just about anything he put his mind to.

But the fact Belanger's post-NHL days involve packing people up has little to do with his brawn.

Belanger is vice-president of players relations for Sportstar Relocation, a company that specializes in moving professional athletes around North America.

Having been traded twice over the course of his 248-game NHL career, Belanger knows firsthand the anxiety that's involved in having to pack up your life at the drop of a hat.

He was in Montreal when he learned he'd been dealt from the New York Islanders to the Boston Bruins back in 1998.

"I never went back to my house in New York," said Belanger, who also played for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Los Angeles Kings. "I went right back to Boston and never saw my house again."

When Belanger, who turned 34 this week, signed with the Kings as a free agent in the summer of 2001, he bought his home through a realtor named Ed Kaminsky.

The two men kept in touch over the years and after Belanger retired in 2005, they beat around the notion of the tough guy joining Sportstar, of which Kaminsky was president and CEO.

Though the company was already established, it had yet to truly take flight. But things have taken an upturn in the two years since Belanger got involved, thanks in large part to his connections throughout the hockey world dating back to his playing career.

Sportstar deals with athletes from a variety of sports and, as with many businesses, depends heavily on word of mouth for growth.

The company was recently added to the NHL Players' Association's Partner Program, simultaneously increasing its profile and credibility among players. It has helped out several Major League Baseball players and is now working on getting similar visibility with the National Football League Players' Association.

While fans usually think of trades and signings only in terms of how it will affect their team, Belanger and his company puts together a thorough needs analysis to help entire families through what can be a tumultuous time. The swap might be about adding goals to a team, but the move triggers a pile of needs addressed by Belanger and Co., right down to getting groceries in your new fridge.

"The teams don't take care of you on the way out," said Belanger, noting players often know nothing about the city they've been traded to and end up living in hotels for months at a time while sorting things out. "They take care of you on the way in, but once you're traded, you're on your own."

That's where Sportstar goes to work.

"Do you have property to sell, do you need to move your dog, your car, household goods?" Belanger asked. "(You need e)verything. And then, after (we) get that all figured out, we start working on the new city you're going to; where you want to live? This is where all the other players live, this is where your practice rink is, this is where downtown is."

Belanger's wife, Sandra, is also involved with the company. The fact she's experienced packing her life up in the blink of an eye certainly gives her solid ground to stand on when reaching out to prospective clients.

"It gives some credibility when she calls because she's been through the moves, she knows exactly what type of services they need and what type of stress level these ladies are going through," Belanger said. "A lot of it is designed for the wives. The wives are often the ones who do everything, because the player really doesn't have time.

"The only change the player makes is the jersey change; the wife is the one who makes the transition."

In a profession where going coast-to-coast is just part of the whole game, Belanger said it's easy to forget the people fans see on TV are more than just point-producing entities.

"People like routine and structure – this is the grocery store I go to, this is the gas station I go to. Everybody likes that and athletes like it too," he said. "They're human too.

"The fans don't realize (how hectic trade-related moves are), but how are they supposed to? They haven't been through it. And you don't hear players bitching and complaining about it. It's just the way it is."

Ryan Dixon is a writer and copy editor for The Hockey News magazine, the co-author of the book [Hockey's Young Guns](#) and a regular contributor to THN.com. His [blog](#) appears Wednesdays and his column, [Top Shelf](#), appears every second Friday.

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COMMENTS

Bob Allisat (Posted 2008-05-19 13:28:40)
Cowards

whatsthatsmeil (Posted 2008-05-18 15:42:22)
Listen.. When you get traded it means one of two things... Either no one wants you, or everyone wants you. Take the second option and run.

A S R (Posted 2008-05-16 22:21:16)
Don't be so sure some of us don't either appreciate or know the feeling. Being in the military is very similar. I was moved around from week to week. I got to play for the same team but I was in a new environment too often to count. I always feel bad for a player who is traded. It must feel like the floor fell out from underneath of them and of their family. I am glad to see that someone is taking the initiative to put something together that is beneficial to the company and to the family.

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