

Top hockey players look to local agents

By Dan Goldman, staff writer

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Pittsford, N.Y. — Back in 1985, Steve Bartlett heard friends who played professional hockey complain about their agents. Bartlett volunteered his assistance with contracts and other finances.

That quickly evolved into becoming a full-time hockey agent, and today Bartlett's Pittsford-based Sports Consulting Group represents about 40 NHL players.

The reason Bartlett is in the field has remained the same all along.

"I think it's the satisfaction of the feeling at the end of the day that you've had a positive effect on the guys' careers is a really rewarding feeling," he said.

Bartlett played hockey for Monroe High School in Rochester and earned a scholarship to the University of Vermont.

"At the time, I was a pretty good player out of this area," he said. "It has changed a lot over the years. Now there are people who have had a lot more talent and have gone a lot farther than I did."

Bartlett transferred to the University of Rochester to study business when he realized hockey wasn't how he could make a living. Two years of helping friends without getting paid, word-of-mouth referrals provided him more and more clients.

"I had one player early in my career that was traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins," he said. "By Christmas that year I had signed the team, all by word-of-mouth advertising."

The Sports Consulting Group has been based in Pittsford since it was established in 1985.

Bartlett considers his agency a family business because he treats players like one, but also because his sons are involved. Brian is the agency's only other agent; and Scott — who is represented by his father, of course — just finished two seasons in the East Coast Hockey League.

"It was a pretty easy choice," Scott said with a grin. "I always kid with my Dad that I'll leave him for my brother."

Brian Bartlett started out helping his father during the summer in high school and started full-time in 2005.

"I was around it my whole life so I could see the relationships and friendships that he built up with his guys," said Dan Goldman.

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closing on a home.

The Sports Consulting Group roster of players includes Buffalo Sabres star Thomas Vanek and Team USA captain J. Langenbruner, as well as professional players from the Rochester area like Ryan Callahan, Brian and Stephen Gionta, Marty Reasoner of Honeoye Falls; and Chris Collins of Fairport.

Callahan, a forward for the New York Rangers, said deciding by whom to be represented was an easy decision, knowing track record and having played hockey with his son Scott.

"With the amount of guys he has, it shows that he's a great agent and he does well for us," said Callahan.

"He's a great guy, down to earth, he is everything you can ask for in an agent," added Stephen Gionta, who plays in the Devils minor league system. "He puts his own time and energy into every guy, no matter what level of play you're at. I get that with the big companies."

Bartlett said one of his greatest accomplishments as an agent was negotiating Vanek's seven-year, \$50 million contract which changed the market for player contracts. However, he also is proud of lesser-known deals.

"The easiest guys to represent are the stars, things come to them pretty easily," Bartlett said.

"When you feel you helped a guy who maybe couldn't have made it without a push from you to get a shot with a team, it's more gratifying."

Bartlett said he's proud that his clients, and hockey players in general, are anything but high-maintenance. Many of them showed up last month for his agency's annual development camp for younger prospects at the Rochester Institute of Technology, giving high-school-age players from across the country a chance to skate and work out with pro players.

Being agents, Brian and Steve Bartlett watch hockey games differently than fans, as they support teams with their clients.

"While you certainly have favorite teams, it tends to be where you have the most players," Steve Bartlett said. "If you have players on two teams, you're hoping for a shootout or tie. It's sort of like a parent with two kids you love and you want them to do well."

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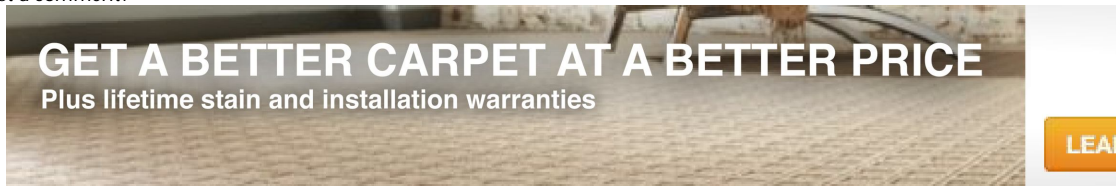
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