

John Cullen



John Cullen, above and right, was a two-time NHL All-Star.

points in 10 games.

Cullen had his best season in 1990–91. As one of the team's top offensive centres, he scored 94 points in the Penguins' first 65 games and played in his first NHL All-Star Game. However, when Lemieux returned after missing an additional 50-games due to injury, Cullen's playing time and production declined.

On March 1, 1991, the Penguins completed a blockbuster trade which sent Cullen to the Hartford Whalers, along with Zarley Zalapski and Jeff Parker in exchange for Hartford's all-time leading scorer, Ron Francis.

The Penguins almost turned down the deal as they were concerned about giving up Cullen's playmaking and leadership abilities, while his former teammates credited Cullen as being the primary reason they were in a playoff position at the time the trade happened. After the Penguins won their first Stanley Cup that season, Phil Bourque later said it "broke his heart" that Cullen was not able to share in that championship.

In Hartford, Cullen worked to overcome the Hartford fans' disappointment at losing Francis. They initially booed him to show their dissatisfaction with the trade. He scored 16 points in 13 regular season games to finish the season with 110 points combined between the Penguins and Whalers, and was the team's best player in their first round loss to the Boston Bruins in the 1991 Stanley Cup Playoffs. He initially accepted an invitation to join the Canadian team at the 1991 Canada Cup, but subsequently chose not to participate as his contract had expired, leading to insurance concerns. Still without a contract when the 1991–92 season began, Cullen missed the first four games before signing a four-year deal with Hartford worth a total of \$4 million. He returned to score 77 points in 77 games in his first full season with the Whalers and represented the team at the 1992 All-Star Game.

Over the next several years he would go on to play for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning, but his career was halted in 1997 when he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. A brief comeback ensued in 1998 after an 18-month battle with the disease, for which the NHL awarded him the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, but he retired to serve as an assistant coach for a year with the Lightning.

He then joined his brother in the car dealership business after leaving the game, and briefly operated his own dealership until forced to close during the automotive industry crisis of 2008–2010

August 2, 1964 -

Although John Cullen toiled for a number of NHL teams during his NHL career, he was considered a standout and was much in demand.

Cullen was born in Puslinch, Ontario on August 2, 1964. One of six children of Barry and Loretta Cullen, his father and uncles Brian and Ray all played in the NHL. Cullen and his three brothers all played as well.

John looked up to his older brother Terry, himself a top NHL prospect until a broken neck ended his career. He suffered the injury after being hit from behind into the boards during a college game.

While his brother was highly sought by American universities, John received only two scholarship offers, choosing to play for Boston University (BU) in 1983. At the same time, his mother Loretta was diagnosed with skin cancer, and died early in his freshman year.

Cullen dedicated every game he played to his mother's memory and felt that the inspiration he drew from his mother's battle allowed him to become a better player. A standout at Boston University, he was named the East Coast Athletic Conference Rookie of the Year in 1983–84 after leading his team in scoring with 56 points.

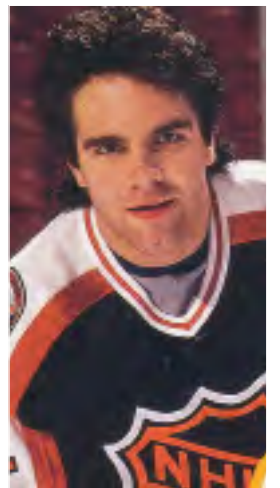
He was named to the Hockey East All-Star Teams in 1985, 1986 and 1987, and a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) East Second Team All-American in 1986 and graduated as BU's all-time scoring leader with 241 points, and was named to BU's Hockey East 25th anniversary team in 2009.

He was passed over in the 1984 NHL Entry Draft, but Buffalo selected him in the 1986 NHL Supplemental Draft, though they didn't offer a contract. Instead, he signed with the Flint Spirits of the International Hockey League (IHL) for the 1987–88 season and was named the IHL's co-Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player after leading the league in scoring with 157 points, including 48 goals.

That season he won the James Gatschene Memorial Trophy as league most valuable player while sharing the Gary F. Longman Memorial Trophy with Ed Belfour as rookie of the year.

More importantly, his outstanding year caught the attention of the Sabres and the Pittsburgh Penguins, and he signed a contract with the Penguins for the league minimum, passing up a superior contract offer from Buffalo as he remained upset at how they had released him the year before.

Cullen made his NHL debut in 1988–89, appearing in 79 games with the Penguins and scoring 49 points. He was given a greater role with the Penguins the following year after Mario Lemieux missed 21 games due to a back injury. He responded by scoring 32 goals and 92 points to finish third in team scoring. He also played for Team Canada at the 1990 World Championships, scoring four



Inducted 2011