

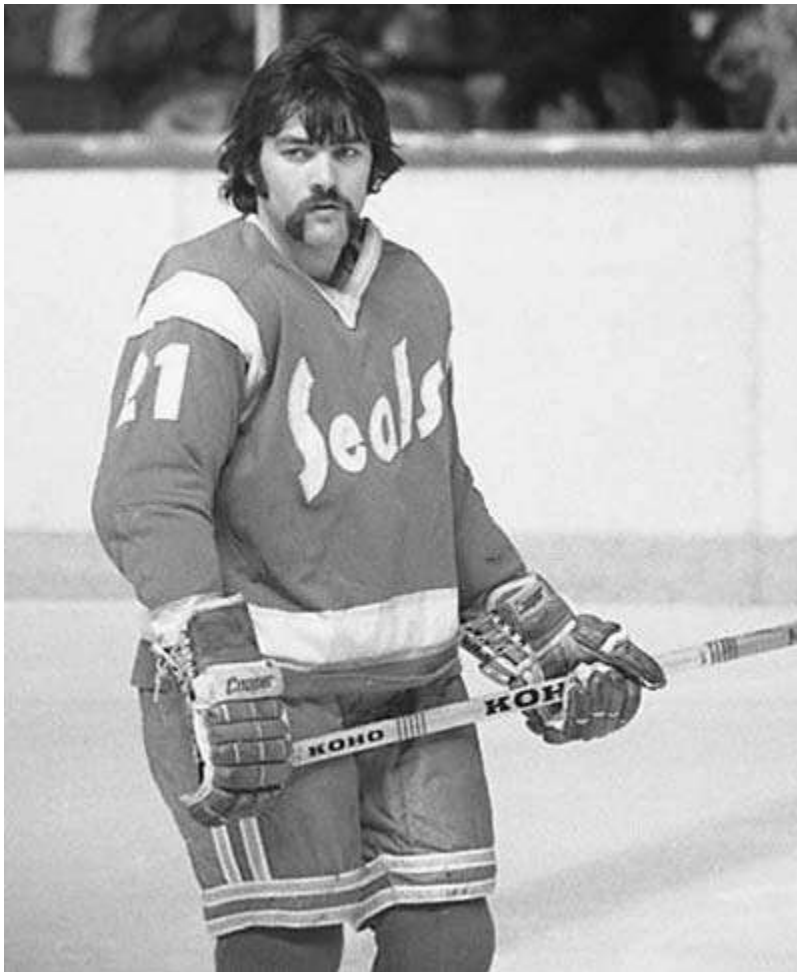
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# Dennis Maruk: Unappreciated super sniper

By Ihor Stelmach

He was described by some as another Marcel Dionne. They called him “Pee-Wee,” and he is for sure the most unheralded of the 19 players in NHL history to have scored 60 goals in one season.

Diminutive in stature at 5-foot-8, 165 pounds, but with the inner fortitude of a true hockey player, Ukrainian Dennis Maruk broke into the league in 1975 during the golden days of goon hockey. The extremely talented center compensated for his lack of size with a gritty style of play, a confident attitude and a mean-looking Fu Manchu mustache.



[Facebook.com/dennisjohnmaruk](https://www.facebook.com/dennisjohnmaruk/) / Dennis Maruk, complete with Fu Manchu mustache, in his California Golden Seals jersey.

The first teams he played on, the California Golden Seals and the Cleveland Barons, were both laughing stocks, so Maruk focused on scoring points, hoping other organizations would notice his

production. Despite his scoring exploits with dismal clubs, team success was always ahead of any personal achievements.

Maruk described it as an athlete's personal pride and inner drive to succeed in the game, rather than selfish play. His point production could only assist his team, not work against it. If the team could not turn around its fortunes, the hope was Maruk's playing well and hard would result in an opportunity elsewhere.

The 1978-1979 season looked promising for a while, when the Seals-Barons franchise merged with the Minnesota North Stars. It looked like Maruk would finally get the chance to play for a contending team.

This proved not to be the case due to the North Stars' strength at the center ice position with Bobby Smith and Tim Young manning the top two slots. General Manager Lou Nanne informed Maruk a trade would be imminent. A deal finally got done in October, and Maruk was shipped off to the Washington Capitals in exchange for a first-round draft choice.

Maruk's dream had come true. He proceeded to blossom into one of the NHL's elite point men with the Capitals. In 1980-1981, he tallied 50 goals and 47 assists for 97 points on a Washington squad that managed a mere 70 points, finishing out of the playoffs. The next season, centering a line with gritty left wing Ryan Walter and one-year wonder Chris Valentine, Maruk scored an unbelievable 60 goals and 136 points, ranking fourth overall in league scoring.

The trio clicked on all cylinders: Walter was a super strong, up-and-down winger, strong puck handler and very physical. Valentine had good hands, was a steady skater, real good with the puck. Maruk, in the middle, fed his wingers and capitalized on their corner work with tons of goals from in front of the net.

After breaking Capitals' individual scoring records, the team rewarded Maruk by moving him to left wing in 1982-1983 to make room for sophomore phenom Bobby Carpenter. Maruk lined up with grinders Doug Jarvis and Ken Houston, but still managed a most respectable 81 points. The summer of 1983 saw him traded back to Minnesota, but for only a second-round draft pick.

Maruk did not hold it against the Caps for the trade, instead understanding it as part of the business of playing in the National Hockey League. The joke was that GM Nanne had lent Maruk to the Capitals for five years.

In 1984 Maruk enjoyed a second playoff appearance with the North Stars. Four years later, he shattered a kneecap while blocking a slap shot by Buffalo Sabres defenseman Grant Ledyard, ending a very underrated NHL career.

Maruk was selected to two NHL All-Star Games and holds the Washington Capitals' single-season point-scoring and single-season assists records. In 888 NHL games he scored 356 goals, 522 assists and 878 total points. He had six seasons of 30+ goals. His career highlight: just making it to the National Hockey League.



NHL.com / Dennis Maruk plays in a Washington Capitals Alumni game in 2012.

**MARUK MOMENTS:** He was the 21st overall selection in the 1975 NHL Draft. Born on November 15, 1955, in Toronto, at young age he watched the Maple Leafs on TV's "Hockey Night in Canada." The first famous hockey player he met was Bobby Hull at a practice at Maple Leaf Gardens while with the Marlies (he was then 12 years old). After he tore his knee ligament (MCL), he missed an entire year (1978-1979) with Minnesota. Maruk was very frustrated with not making the playoffs and playing on losing teams. His most memorable goals: first-ever goal against Wayne Thomas in Toronto while with the Seals and his 60th against Montreal. His closest friend in the NHL was fellow Ukrainian Brian Bellows in Minnesota. Maruk's toughest competitors to play against were Bryan Trottier and Mark Messier. He like to play tennis and golf, and respects people who deal with adversity and challenge themselves to overcome it. He also believes passion is essential in life. Maruk was elected to Ukrainian Sports Hall of Fame in September 2018.

From the Ukrainian Weekly: <http://www.ukrweekly.com/uwwp/ukrainian-pro-hockey-update-dennis-maruk-unappreciated-super-sniper/#>

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