

# *The Softer Side of* **DEREK BOOGAARD**

On the ice he's one of the most feared enforcers in the game. Off the ice, Derek Boogaard is hardly recognizable.

**BY REBECCA FINLAY**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRUCE KLUCKHOHN AND COURTESY OF THE BOOGAARD FAMILY

**T**HERE IS SOMETHING FASCINATING ABOUT Derek Boogaard. Never mind the fact that the guy can do things to an opponent's face that would make Picasso seem like a realist. Or that his towering presence makes the NHL's toughest afraid of their own shadow. He steps out onto the ice at Xcel Energy Center, and the crowd shifts in anticipation. With one board-rattling check, the crowd roars. With one hint of an altercation, the crowd is on their feet. Revered much like a superhero, everyone loves "The Boogeyman." But one can't be a true superhero without a softer side. So after the gloves came off, we sat down for a heart-to-heart on none other than Valentine's Day.

Standing at 6' 7" and 250-pounds (closer to 6'11" with his skates on) Boogaard is hard to miss when he comes off the ice, and in full equipment appears to be of superhuman

size. However, an amazing transformation takes place within the Wild locker room. Much like Superman's phone booth, behind those closed wooden doors engraved with the Wild

logo he goes from "The Boogeyman" to Derek. A soft-spoken, 6' 7", 250-pound, 24-year-old cleverly disguised behind a pair of dark-rimmed glasses. At first glance you'd expect him to be working at a bookstore, not spending his days as one of the most feared enforcers in the National Hockey League. But that's the way he likes it.

"You'd be surprised. A lot of people don't really recognize me too much," Boogaard says with a smile, "But they'll get a glimpse and they'll say, 'Are you Derek Boogaard?' and I'm like, 'Well, yeah.' They don't recognize me because I have my glasses. They'll ask, 'Are you like Clark Kent or the Hulk or something like that?'...It's great."

So when asked about his lesser-



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known identity, or softer side, Boogaard laughs and admits that he's unsure of what that may be. And after a few questions, it becomes apparent why.

His favorite off-ice hobby? "Boxing," he says instantly with an "I told-you-so" smile. No help there. A romantic-comedy movie that he'll admit to watching? "I really liked 'The Break-Up' a lot," he said after several moments of careful thought.

Yes, that's the one where Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn fought the whole way through. Go figure. Does he, maybe, play an instrument? "No, my mom bought me a guitar last win-

Well, we're getting closer. Have any pets? "I have an English Bulldog who lives with my dad up in Regina," he said, quickly adding, "she looks so mean but she has the best personality."

Batman had Robin but The Boogeyman has Trinity, his faithful canine sidekick who has been known herself to go incognito at times under the disguise of "Spidergirl."

Mean on the ice but with a great personality, Boogaard racked up 158 penalty minutes last year (the most on the team). This year he's up to 95 at press time. That's over four hours total in the box. Long enough to watch

But then he began talking more about his family, with whom he is very close. The oldest of four children in the Boogaard household, height and athletic ability run in the family. His younger brother, Aaron, 20, is 6' 3" and plays hockey in the WHL for the Tri-Cities Americans. His other brother, Ryan, 22, is 6' 1" and is going to university in Regina, Sask., while working at a financial institution. His younger sister, Krysten, 19, is 6' 4", and currently plays basketball with the Canadian National Junior Team based out of Hamilton, Ontario. She recently signed with the University of Kansas to play basketball on a full

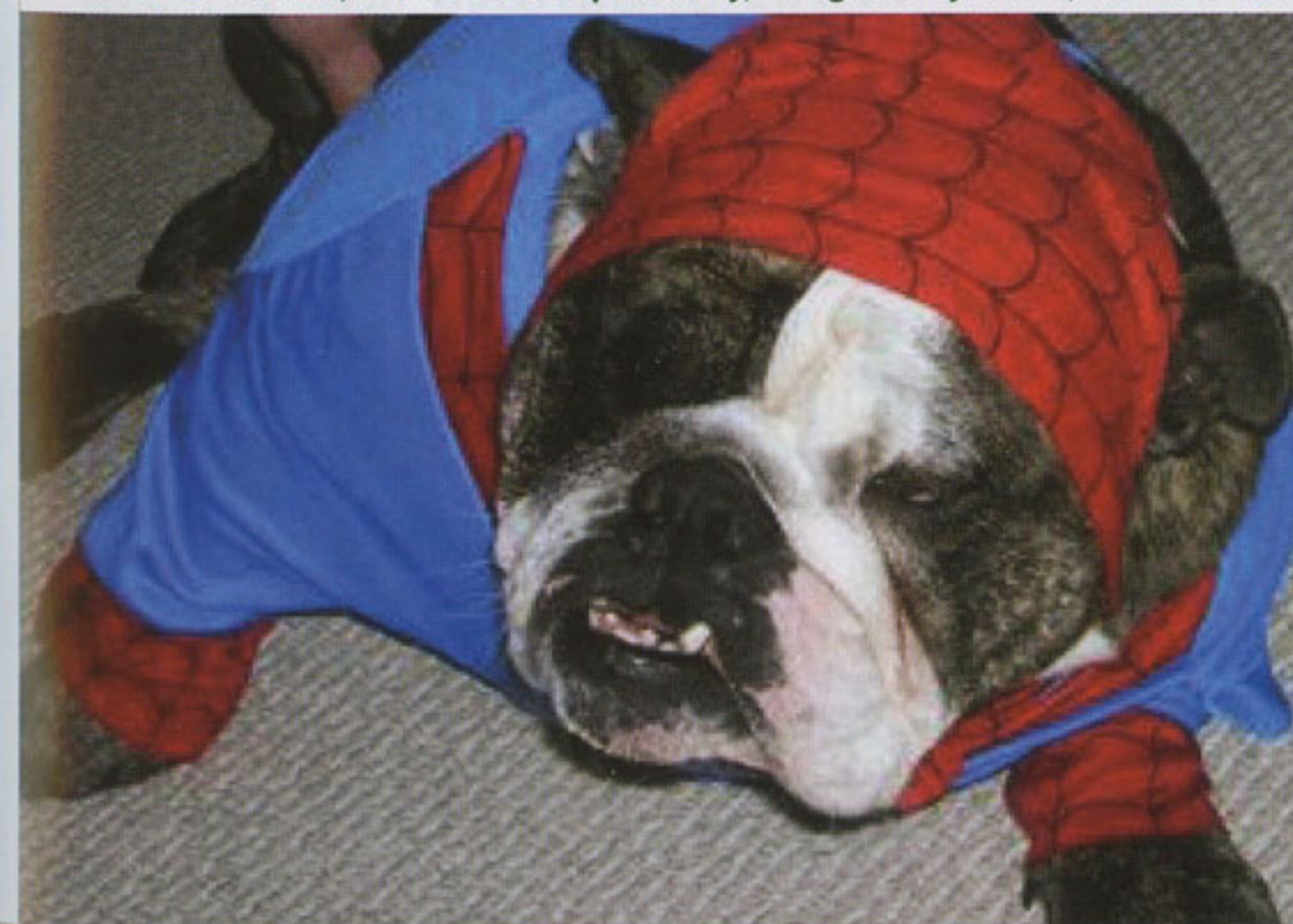
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ter for Christmas, and I still haven't touched it," Boogaard admits, "I still have the guitar though."

"The Break-Up" twice. Discovering his softer side may be more difficult than anticipated.

**SPIDERGIRL?** Boogaard's dog, Trinity has also been known to transform into a superhero. "She looks so mean, but has the best personality," Boogaard says. Hmm, sounds familiar.



scholarship next fall.

In fact, his sister attended her first Wild game at the Xcel Energy Center on March 11, and was very excited to watch her brother defend his home rink.

"I know basketball isn't Derek's favorite sport to watch but he would sometimes come to see my high school games," said Krysten, "This past summer when I made the Junior National Team it was a very exciting and special time for me, and Derek flew down to Colorado Springs to watch me compete. That was one of the nicest things he has done for me. It showed that he supports me and my sport."



His dad, Len, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.) officer and his mom, Joanne, a receptionist at a doctor's office, were kept busy raising four very active children. "We patched a lot of walls in the basement," Joanne laughs. Boogaard admits that he and his brothers liked to rough-house, but his father, a professional enforcer as well, did his best to keep everyone under control.

"I remember when we were living in Melford, Sask., they had Acceleration Hockey Training in Saskatoon, so we had to drive to Saskatoon three or four times a week. Every once in a while, my dad would be working so

up into the cage. It would hurt, but it kept us in line."

Today, Boogaard still fights with his brothers for fun, honing his boxing skills for game days. His parents take the back seat now and watch him police his team on television and, when possible, from the stands.

"My whole body just tenses up [when he gets into a fight]," Joanne said. "He's my baby out there. He may be big, but he's still my baby."

Boogaard started skating at age four, and always wanted to play hockey. "I've never wanted to do anything but play in the NHL," said Boogaard. "When my teachers asked what my back-up plan was, I didn't have one. My goal has always been to play hockey professionally." And if he didn't make it to the NHL? "I'd be working on the oil rigs back home [in Saskatchewan] with some of my friends," Boogaard said with certainty.

By the age of five, he was the size of a 10-year-old, but don't let his size or strength fool you. "He's just a great big teddy bear," Joanne said. "What you see on the ice is what has been created for him.



**THE BOOGEYMAN** A photo of the Boogeyman in his younger years. Boogaard started skating at the age of four years old.

He's been put into that role, and if he didn't have that role, he probably wouldn't be in the NHL. Yeah, he's big and that's how he's gotten to where he is, but it's been tough for him growing up with that. But I think he's proved himself. Everyone thought he wouldn't make it because he wasn't a big goal scorer. They'd say, look at this big kid, he wants to play in the NHL. But look at him now."

His steadfast determination and

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**— DEREK BOOGAARD**

hard work paid off, and today he enjoys his Wild ride. Fans of all ages in the State of Hockey have embraced the "big kid," and line up at

events just for a glimpse or to receive his autograph. At a recent signing, Boogaard wasn't as concerned by the

**THE BOOGAARD BROTHERS** A photo of Derek and his brothers. His youngest brother, Aaron currently plays in the Western Hockey League.



he'd just take us in his police car," Boogaard recalls, "He wasn't really allowed to do it, but he just did it anyway. And every once in a while we'd get in a fight in the back of the police car, and he'd just shut the screen door, hammer the breaks and we'd fly







**REGO** As nice as he may seem off the ice, Derek Boogaard has a job to do when he's on it. Here he's showing Columbus Blue Jackets Shelley that it doesn't pay to bully his teammates.

length of the line as he was about some of the kids having to wait outdoors to see him on a cold winter's day. "There were little kids freezing out there," said Boogaard. But they waited for him anyway, and he signed for every last one. "It's great whenever somebody wants your autograph. It's never a bad thing. It's exciting."

Both men and women alike are impressed by his hard-hitting, physical style of play. So much so that his jersey is the 3rd-highest seller at the Wild's team store, The Hockey Lodge

(and number one in player t-shirt sales out of eight available players), and even his own mother had a hard time getting one. "I remember after he first started with the Wild, I asked him to send me a jersey," his mom Joanne recalls, "He told me he was trying, but every time he went to the store, they were always sold out!"

Feared on the ice as "The Boogeyman," he is sent out at night to protect his team and delight his city. Although unsure of his own softer side, it appears to define who he is.

From traveling across the country to watch his sister compete, to showing concern about kids standing in the cold to get his autograph, to proudly telling stories about his family, to shopping for his mother, to playing with his dog, as Derek Boogaard, he is far from threatening. Rather, his quiet compassion appears to be what gives him his strength.

But I wouldn't advise giving him a hard time about it. •

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