Rivalry

by InsaneTrollLogic

Summary

Shawn Spencer is the top pick in the NHL entry draft. Henry thinks they should have really taken Stamkos instead.

Notes

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It seemed a bit silly to have multiple hockey verses. The stories are only loosely connected.

The first two picks of the 2008 NHL entry draft are largely considered failures. The first pick is Shawn Spencer, a twenty-one year old phenom, son of the great Henry Spencer who's number hangs up next to Wayne Gretsky's. Shawn is drafted by the LA Kings who'd traded up to get him.

The second pick is the sociopathic English Goaltender, Sherlock Holmes, who goes to the Colorado Avalanche. One year later they will both break into the league, Shawn delayed because of attitude problems, Sherlock because a goaltender apparently has to mature for a year.

Henry Spencer has the following to say on the number one draft pick: "They should have taken Stamkos."
It's not that Shawn doesn't have talent. No, Shawn has never been short on talent. He's got an eerily good sense of what's going happening on the ice. It's a sixth sense, but not a natural one. From the time he was old enough to walk, he was on skates and by the time he was old enough to listen, he was being trained.

In the Spencer household when they weren't playing hockey on ice, hockey was on television. When the NHL was in the off-season, international hockey was on. Shawn can't remember a time before he was involved him hockey, can't remember a time where he didn't have his father in his ear saying, See how he's leaning. He's hiding an injury to his left knee. Watch how he bite on head-fakes. Pay attention to me, Shawn. You're going to thank me for this later...

Shawn grows up loving hockey. He can't help it. His family eats, sleeps and breathe it. It's their only means of communications and besides Gus, his only constant companion. They spend their youth sneaking into ice rinks, wearing Henry Spencer's too-big pads and sweaters and attempting increasingly ridiculous trick shots.

From the time Shawn's two years old right up until he's twelve he wants to be an NHL defenseman like his old man. Then he spends two weeks wanting to be a Nascar driver, then Chuck Norris, then a pro football star, then the driver of the wienermobile. This change happens to coincide with Henry's departure from the NHL and his mother's departure from his father.

When he's twelve years old Shawn stops playing hockey and doesn't play again until his sophomore year of high school when the guidance counselor proposes, "Join a school sport or get expelled."

It all comes back with shocking ease, like it never actually went away. It helps that Gus has been playing on the same team for a year already. Gus is a goalie, a mediocre one at that, but Shawn doesn't care because he's on the bus, at every practice and behind him on the ice.

His high school coach tries to play Shawn at defense for no other reason than that was where his father played. Shawn ignores him. In fact, Shawn ignores most things his coach says. He appoints himself a forward and joins the offence with reckless abandon. He scores when he decides to score, almost all of it on trick shots. His wrister is good, but he delights in the kind of goals that would make highlight reels, shots from impossible angles and between the leg passes. He attracts college scouts, but none that want to take the risk on someone prone to Shawn's antics. Shawn never wanted to go to college anyway.

Through all this Gus quietly accepts the team's captaincy and accepts an academic scholarship to UCLA.

Shawn, after the end of his senior season, drops of high school with three months left, gets his GED and hops on his motorcycle. It's six months before anyone hears from him because he wound up in Latvia, playing on the Latvian world juniors team. He's not a legal player but the team's not good enough to attract that much controversy and Shawn speaks the language fluently.

When he's eventually discovered, he defects back to the United States' junior team and is part of a US gold medal effort. He's clearly the best talent on the team.

Objectively, Shawn probably is the most skilled player in the draft. But it's a year when the best two
players are obvious head-cases. But while Holmes could reportedly dismantle a team within a week, Shawn's pranks and attitude made him a locker room favorite.

Shawn's first season he spends thirteen games in the NHL. He scores ten goals in that time but is at a -4 because he keeps forgetting where he's supposed to be on defense. In the off-season, the coach is fired and starting in training camp, Shawn decides the NHL forwards get better things to play with so he may as well stay.

Coach Vick is a former woman's player on the world level, had begun her job as a assistant coach with the Kings a few years before. The position is interim for now, but the players all see to respect her and fear her just a little.

Shawn spends training camp somewhat stalking the team's crusty old captain. Carlton Lassiter is a no-nonsense defenseman who controls the entire game from the point. He barks out orders constantly that Shawn mostly ignores except for the rare occasions when the orders make sense or are simply too loud not to obey immediately.

In his free time, Lassiter is distressing predictable. He goes to the same restaurants (alone) and orders the same meal (steak, medium rare) and drinks embarrassingly fruity cocktails (though Shawn should have expected as much considering how he takes his coffee). He amuses himself by getting to the restaurant before Lassiter and making the orders for him, sitting at the table like he was meant to be there.

Coach Vick pulls him aside three days before opening night. "Shawn, I get this is your way of making friends, but it won't work on Lassiter."

Shawn responds by going to his twitter and tweeting: @lassieface y do u deny our #epiclove?

(Lassiter didn't have a twitter so of course, Shawn made one for him. The profile reads LA Kings, #34. Likes shot-blocking, strawberry daiquiris and your lovely, lovely face.)

Shawn's on the roster for opening night. He scores the team's first goal of the year on his first shift of the night. It's a trick shot from behind the net, scooping the puck up on the blade of his stick and bouncing it off the back of the goalie like Gretsky used to do.

The equalizer comes late in the second on a bizarre deflection that catches the entire stadium off guard.

They lose in the last minute of regulation. Shawn's on the ice at the time and so is Lassiter. San Jose's had the puck in the zone for a minute and a half, and Lassiter's already blocked three shots. Shawn's trying to pick out when the puck is headed but his legs feel like lead and his brain feels even worse. His clearing attempt is intercepted and the shot's in the back of the LA net before he knows what happens.

At his apartment, Shawn eats his usual post-game bag of jelly-beans, withholding all the pineapple flavored ones to save for the first win. He has three missed messages on his phone from his father that he will not return. He checks his computer, pleased to find that @lassieface's following is slowly approaching half of @SpenStar's. He amuses himself with a fake argument between the two, wondering vaguely why Gus hasn't called to tell him to knock it off.

Vick calls him to her office after the next practice and tells him to quit the twitter thing before Lassiter finds out. Shawn retaliates by creating a twitter entitled @TheRealCarltonLassiter. And
proceeds to have the exact same sort of arguments he had every day after practice.

A week later Gus is sitting in the team room, looking out of place in his sharp suit. Shawn's genuinely surprised to see him there. "Gus! I thought you had a real job."

"I have a new real job now. Vick practically begged me to come."

"You're playing hockey with us?"

"I'm one of the PR guys."

"I thought you sold something boring. Pizzas, powerbars, pineapples…"

"Do you know any pineapple salesmen? Is that even a real job? I sold pharmaceuticals and I was damn good about it, but apparently I have a reputation as a mediating influence."

"They hired you to baby-sit me."

"Essentially, yes."

"They do realize I'm going to corrupt you completely."

"I'm hoping that hasn't occurred to them yet. Have you seen the girls on the training staff? The blonde one, Juliet, she reads my favorite comic series and she's hot."

"Aw, man. I knew I should have gone in to get my pinky iced."

"Did you hurt your pinky?"

"No, it's just the smallest part of the body I can stick in an ice bath. Those things are cold."

"Don't you play hockey? I always got cold when we were playing in high school."

Gus is notoriously warm-blooded. Shawn wonders sometimes how they became friends at all but he can't actually remember a time when they weren't.

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Shawn, to his own delight and Lassiter's anguish is fast becoming a fan favorite. The S. Spencer jersey is far and away the highest selling on of the team and top ten in the NHL. His plus-minus isn't the lowest on the team, but it's far from good especially when all his goals are factored in. Shawn meets his father for dinner and the man spends the entire time lecturing him on how to become a two-way forward. Shawn in a fit of desperation tries to distract him by pointing out the Monday night football game. This of course reminds Henry of the month-long span when Shawn wanted nothing more than to be Peyton Manning when he grew up. Which only makes things worse.

At home, Shawn gets on the computer and has @TheRealCarltonLassiter write a half dozen angry messages to @Lassieface. It doesn't improve his mood.
The next morning, Gus knocks on his door, herds Shawn to his laptop and says, "You made 'The Science of the Netminder.'"

Shawn's been dimly aware of Sherlock Holmes since the draft. He knows about the ridiculous accent, knows his position and team and knows he runs a website.

He's never been to the website before. The intro is basic. *My name is Sherlock Holmes. I am a goaltender for the Colorado Avalanche. I observe everything.*

"Just a wee little bit pretentious, aren't we," Shawn mutters, clicking toward the team pages before scrolling to the LA Kings.

"Oh, don't try and pretend you don't do the same thing."

Shawn does do the same thing. Sort of. His website has flames and glitter on it. It also as 1/100th of the amount of hits.

S. Spencer is the sixth and final entry on the list and also the shortest. He guesses he should be vaguely impressed he's even made Sherlock Holmes's scouting list, but the words themselves sting. "Spencer relies on manufactured flair because he lacks speed?"

"You've still never beaten me in a race."

"That's because we haven't raced since we were twelve. I'm a professional athlete, Gus."

"You also won't consent to a rematch."

"Anytime, any place." Shawn mumbles, returning to the website to scan over the two paragraphs about his game. Phrases keep jumping out at him like, *not a two-way player and cannot finish easy goals.*

"You know, he's got a point with some of that," Gus says.

Shawn wills the website to self-destruct with his mind. Which is stupid considering it's on the internet and is probably only a string of ones and zeros. Or was it a series of tubes? Shawn could never get that straight. He just sort of chalked it up to magic.

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Colorado starts their road swing and Shawn is focused like he's never been before. Sherlock Holmes might be the best goaltending prospect in decades but when Shawn Spencer decides to focus, there's not much that gets in his way.

He puts two shots past Holmes. The first happens a little more than two minutes into the game as Shawn shoots through a screen and finds the five hole. Holmes isn't the only one who sees everything and Shawn can see his weakness. He relies on physical cues, making adjustments almost instantaneously but Shawn's always had a flair for the dramatic. He thrives on unpredictability, doing things so off the wall that no one can see them coming.
The second goal sneaks into the top shelf with ten minutes to go in the third and Shawn doesn't miss the narrowing of eyes behind the mask as he celebrates with his teammates.

Even Lassiter claps his back on at the end of the shift. It helps that he started the shift he scored on by blocking a shot. The impact point will be a bruise tomorrow but it doesn't hurt quite yet.

They sweat out the win, 2-1 and Vick pulls him aside and says, "That's the kind of performance we've all been expecting from you."

Henry leaves a four second message on the answering machine that just says, "About damn time, kid."

The next three weeks are a train wreck on the ice, but no one ever accused Shawn of consistency. Lassiter starts grinding his teeth every time he sees him again.

Shawn goes out for lunch with his father. They talk about soccer even though it's mid-November. It's a very short conversation.

Gus tells him to suck it up and get over himself.

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Sherlock Holmes is traded the second week of February and through a quick of scheduling, he winds up on the ice against Shawn eight different times that season. Shawn scores nine goals in the matchups, all of them fueled by the pleasure of seeing the tiny changes in the website entry about him. Gus tells him it's not productive to get this worked up over one goaltender. Shawn counters that a point plus per game is more than productive.

He meets Holmes face to face just once. He looks even more absurdly fragile than he does while wearing the pads. He's got a mess of dark curls and the kind of voice that would make James Earl Jones weep with envy. Within three seconds of the meeting, he deduces Shawn's entire life story, up to and including the massive feeling of inadequacy he got every time someone compared him to his father.

Which is of course all information that is readily available online and that's what Shawn really should have pointed out. But he's still floundering a bit. It's not often he runs across people who are smarter than him. "Yeah, well," he sputters, "You're just a mean old poopy head."

"That was terribly incoherent even by your standards, Spencer. Now if you'll kindly move aside, I really must be off."

Shawn spends the next four days trolling Holmes's website using various dummy accounts, one of which has the name Lassiter on it. Holmes responds with a very succinct post on Shawn's website.

*Childish. At very least, try to vary the IP address... *

Shawn smiles.

It is the start of a beautiful friendship...
Or more accurately, the start of the most entertaining rivalry the NHL had ever seen.

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