

No.

NAME
NOM

PROFILE



CLASS MEETS SASS

BY SARAH CHAUNCEY

On a warm day in March, the first real patio day of the year, Kathryn Humphreys still triumphantly bears the scars of winter. Several long pins, to be exact, surgically inserted into her heel after a snowboarding accident during her annual vacation to Whistler, B.C.

"Did you know the heel is one of the hardest bones to break?" she asks, sitting back in a leather easy chair at the back of a Front Street Starbucks, injured foot propped up. "I shattered it. Shattered it. I'm quite proud."

Luckily, the Toronto Maple Leafs don't require Humphreys for their playoff run, but they do rely on her to make them laugh — at least during the regular season. As sports anchor for Citytv's late-night news, the willowy blond with the impish green eyes has made a reputation for herself as a fun-loving, well, goofball.

A lifelong Leafs fan, Humphreys comes by her sports knowledge honestly. Her grandfather bought the Ontario Hockey League's Oshawa Generals from the Boston Bruins and passed down the team to her father in 1970, the year she was born. "Rather than getting a babysitter, my mum would take myself and my two sisters to the hockey game." On those occasions when a babysitter was required, the Humphreys usually turned to one of the players the family billeted, like former Leafs defenceman Rick Lanz. "Hockey was a big part of our lives, even though I never played. My parents are old-fashioned, and they didn't think it was very 'ladylike.'"

Humphreys is an all-Canadian gal, down-to-earth and unassuming. But even dressed down — in a generic black toque, white T-shirt, hoodie sweatshirt in the colour Crayola used to call "burnt sienna" and matching grey track pants — she embodies a casual elegance. Not that she's aiming for that look. "Look how 'ladylike' I turned out," she chortles, nodding towards the big, clunky walking cast on her foot. "Please. They probably wish they'd put me in hockey."

Humphreys and her sisters — one older, one younger — were an athletic bunch, playing basketball, volleyball, running cross-country and attending a summer sports

camp in Huntsville, Ont. But "for some reason, hockey was a boys' sport to [her parents]."

Boys' sport or not, Humphreys is true blue — and white — when it comes to the National Hockey League. "I grew up around [the Leafs], watching the games with my dad and went to the University of Toronto — this is my town. I love this city and I love the Leafs."

Humphreys attended the University of Toronto, where she sat on the Victoria College athletic board and played intra-collegiate basketball and volleyball. After graduation, she headed to Australia, primarily because she couldn't think of anything better to do.

"Just an amazing place," she recalls. "People are genuinely friendly." Aussies don't know much about hockey, though. "No, they don't."



Kathryn Humphreys grills Carlton the Bear on the hockey issues of the day. The Citytv sportscaster and her two sisters played many sports while growing up.

KATHRYN HUMPHREYS PHOTOS: CITYTV

They know a lot about surfing and rugby. It's all about the rugby."

Upon her return to Toronto, Humphreys worked in a bar to pay the rent. It was there she was discovered by Peter Gross, then a sports reporter for 680 News. "He was like, 'You know a lot about sports — ever thought about doing radio?'" She interned at 680 News and eventually landed her own job, doing sports for a radio station near her family's cottage in Muskoka. "I lived at the cottage and worked at the radio station. I did that for a couple of years."

And then Citytv came calling.

In 1997, the sports newsroom at Citytv was a man's world, with former Leaf Jim McKenny at the centre. In the world of Toronto sports, Humphreys was one of the first on-air women to get down and dirty with the guys. She has a unique take, though, on her job and her role.

"I've always thought of myself not as a woman reporter, but as a reporter," she says. "I think of myself more as unique, not by the fact that I'm a woman, but by the fact that I don't take this stuff seriously. I treat it like it's part of the entertainment industry. So I treat it with a sense of humour and I allow the players to laugh at themselves and have some fun with it."

Suddenly, her eyes light up, as she figures out a way to summarize her approach. "I'd like to think that I'm one of the first women who, rather than say, 'Please take me seriously,' I'm like, 'Please do not take me seriously!'"

One might assume that a day in the life of a sports reporter is easy. One would be wrong. Humphreys' typical day begins when she heads to the Leafs' morning skate, or Toronto Raptors practice, depending on which team she's covering. She then heads to the CHUM building to write and produce her story, which will air on the six o'clock news.

Around 5 p.m., she heads home for dinner and a couple of hours of relaxation — which often includes either watching or attending the Leafs game — then head back to City to anchor the night show at 11 p.m. Then it's out for drinks — or maybe a workout — home to bed, and then it starts all over again in the morning.

Given Humphreys' approach to reporting, no one is better suited to pick out the biggest hams in the Leafs lineup. "Wade Belak's pretty goofy," she says, as anyone who has seen his TSN parking-lot promo can attest. "Bryan McCabe can be a total goofball" — no kidding, with that blue mohawk from last year's playoffs — "and Tom Fitzgerald has a good sense of humour."

The wittiest Leaf Humphreys has come across, though, was (former goalie) Glenn Healy. "You could just give him the microphone, and you didn't have to do anything. He would come up with the funniest stories for you." Not surprisingly, Healy has parlayed his quick wit into a broadcasting career on TSN. "He's hilarious, very real and down-to-earth."

Because Humphreys is so easygoing, players feel comfortable goofing around with her. One day, in her own words, she was "being an [idiot]." In retaliation, a few players good-naturedly kept taking shots at the glass directly behind where she was reporting, trying to distract her.

"I treat [sports] like it's part of the entertainment business...I treat it with a sense of humour, and I allow the players to laugh at themselves," says Humphreys.

With typical good humour, Humphreys turned around and pushed her face up against the glass, like a little kid. Players kept shooting pucks right at her, but she didn't flinch. "So I just stayed there, and then I was like, OK, this game's boring, and I walked away, and the next shot — the glass breaks." Had

she not walked away at that split second, "I would have needed major dental surgery for years." And perhaps she would've looked more like a player than a reporter.

It's all fun and games from October to March, but the vibe changes in April. "During the regular season, it's so much easier to do those funny side stories, the lighthearted ones like Bryan McCabe's mohawk... or trying to make a guy laugh. During the playoffs, I usually just stick to hockey. The story is, they're in the playoffs, and that's the story every day."



Humphreys grew up around the Maple Leafs, since her family used to billet hockey players, some of whom did double duty as babysitters.

She notices a palpable change in the locker room once the second season begins. "The players are so much more intense. The regular season, they're very lighthearted, very accommodating. You can joke around with them, but things just get more intense in the playoffs. You can see it in their eyes. They don't want to joke around, and they're more serious."

Humphreys is comfortable in her role as anchor/reporter, and she's honest about her the future of her career. "I think because I never played, I'll never do play-by-play, I'll never do colour commentary, because I think you need [to have played] in order to be believable, but yeah, I still know the game."

No kidding. For as long as she wants, it would seem, she has a good job and a good philosophy: "Be yourself, and if they like you, that's fine, and if they don't like you, that's fine, too. There's a channel-changer, and they can change the channel." ♦

Sarah Chauncey is a freelance writer based in Toronto.