

A familiar Shattuck alumnus fell short in his third shot at the Stanley Cup playoffs last week. But don't fret...



New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist, right, of Sweden, makes a save on New Jersey Devils' Zach Parise during the first period in Game 3 of a first-round NHL hockey playoff series Sunday night, April 13, 2008, at Madison Square Garden in New York. (AP)

Zach will be back

By Bobby Hart
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FARIBAULT — After three seasons and just as many playoff appearances in the NHL, Zach Parise has taken his lumps.

For proof, look no further than the Shattuck-St. Mary's alumnus' smile. There, a temporary artificial denture can be found in place of his front two top teeth, which were knocked out by a Christian Backman cross check in a Game Two playoff loss to the New York Rangers.

These battle scars are becoming more and more common for the New Jersey Devils' forward, who is known for his honest, hard-nosed offensive capabilities. Parise, who lost his front two bottom teeth last season, even dropped his gloves for the first time against Dan Boyle of Tampa Bay in March.

Within moments of the Bloomington native's first fight, which is a hot item on the Web, it was obvious from the second his jersey was pulled over his head that this kind of thing wasn't exactly his forte.

"I think I set the record for getting jersey'd the quickest in the NHL," said Parise, who usually has no need for tying his jersey down. "I don't remember much of it. It was pretty fun though. It was something different and it's nice to get the first one out of the way."

After the Devils were eliminated from the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals with a 5-3



New Jersey Devils' Zach Parise, left, celebrates with Patrik Elias after Elias scored in the shootout to beat the New York Rangers 3-2 on Sunday, April 6, 2008. (AP)

loss to the New York Rangers Friday, Parise's quest for the Stanley Cup will have to wait. But like his denture, the roadblock is only temporary. For Parise, who was a highly coveted pro prospect since he was a teenager at SSM, it has always only been a matter of time.

Growing up fast

Parise's development into a top tier pro started, in many ways, as a student-athlete at SSM.

"It was a great place to go," said Parise, now 23. "It was nice

because we had our own rink and we were able to skate whenever we wanted. We had really good coaches then. As far as off the ice, you meet a lot of good friends and people you keep in touch with now just because you're together all the time."

Parise scored 73 goals and 174 points his senior year at SSM, garnering him attention from college and pro scouts throughout the nation. He took the college hockey scene by storm at the University of North Dakota, where he was among the nation's top scorers as a freshman with 26 goals and 61

points. A year later, Parise finished with 55 points as a sophomore, while also leading the United States to a gold medal as the World Juniors' MVP.

The Devils nabbed Parise as the 17th overall pick in the first round of the 2003 NHL Draft. Just like in college, it didn't take long for him to make a vast impact. After playing in the American Hockey League during the 2004 lockout, Parise scored 14 goals and 32 points in his rookie season. The following year, Parise led the Devils with 31 goals (62 points) and scored 10 points in 11 playoff games.

This past season has been Parise's best yet. He eclipsed last year's total with 32 goals and 65 points and scored five points in the five playoff games against the Rangers.

Parise said the highlight of his career so far was his first hat trick Nov. 30, 2007, against Montreal at home, but the thrill of playing in the NHL playoffs is tough to beat.

"It's so much different than the regular season," Parise said. "The atmosphere in the buildings are that much better and the games are that much more intense. Every shift and every play could make a difference. It's nerve racking, but it's awesome. It's unbelievable to play in the playoffs."

The Devils made it clear they want Parise to continue leading them their, signing him to a \$12.5 million four-year deal this past July.

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New York Rangers' Paul Mara, left, checks New Jersey Devils' Zach Parise during the first period of an NHL hockey playoff game on Wednesday, April 9, 2008, in Newark, N.J. Mara was penalized for hooking on the play. Parise scored 73 goals and 174 during his senior year at Shattuck-St. Mary's, where he garnered national attention from scouts at both the college and professional level. (AP)

Parise still has to pinch himself when he thinks about where hockey has taken him.

"You're getting paid to play a game—it's unreal," Parise said. "It's surprising that this is already my third year. It goes by really quick. A lot of times you don't really sit back and enjoy it and realize where you are at."

But Parise still remembers where he's from.

A Shattuck 'hero'

The roots of Parise's family tree dig deep into SSM. His brother, Jordan, who is a goalie for the Devils' AHL affiliate, played there. His father, J.P., who played for the Minnesota Northstars, is currently the Director of Prospect Evaluation there.

SSM prep coach Tom Ward, who coached Parise for three years, still keeps tabs on his former star.

"He's a tenacious player—he's got a lot of his dad in him," Ward said. "He plays the game the way it should be played, an honest goal line to goal line player. It's been a blast watching him and hopefully we can

watch him for many years playing in the NHL."

Drew Stafford, a second-year player with the Buffalo Sabres this past season, remembers meeting Parise when the two were sophomores at SSM. Stafford admitted to being immediately humbled by his teammate's work ethic.

"One of the reasons he's one of my favorite players is his competitive spirit and how he battles," said Stafford, who was also Parise's teammate at UND. "He's definitely feisty and he's tough to play against. I respect that a lot."

Stafford knows first-hand just how tough of an opponent Parise is. The Sabres and Dev-

ils meet four times per season.

"His skill level is one of the best I've seen," Stafford said. "Some of the stuff that he can do with the puck—he can pretty much put it wherever he wants and that's pretty cool to see."

SSM has a sizable list of alumni in the NHL. Sidney Crosby, Ryan Malone and Ty Conklin are the ones still alive in the playoffs with the Pittsburgh Penguins. But no alumnus attracts more respect among the current SSM players than Parise.

"He's just 'Zach' around here," Ward said. "The kids love him. He's like the Pied Piper. He's absolutely a hero to the kids here on campus."

Although Parise moved to Prior Lake, he still drops in at SSM from time to time. And just like when he was a student, he can be found carving up ice at the Shattuck Hockey Arena.

"He comes around in the summer and is always willing to help other kids," Ward said. "He's not aloof. He jumps right out there with the young kids and the other guys and plays just like he did when he was here, with a smile on his face."

After three rugged seasons in the NHL, Parise's smile is still there, even if all his teeth aren't.

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