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Former rivals Roenick, Hatcher go in as brothers

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The average healing time for a broken jaw is roughly six weeks, and most medical professionals will tell you playing an intense contact sport is unlikely to aid the process.

Then again, Jeremy Roenick wasn't your average patient.

In 1999, Roenick became accustomed to sipping his meals through a straw before he took the ice in the postseason for the Phoenix Coyotes.

"I had my jaw wired shut," Roenick said, "and I actually came back and played 17 days later in the playoffs. I put on a big storm-trooper helmet and played Game 7 of the first round."

This week no doubt will provide fresh reminders of that painful experience when he is inducted into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame along with the man who broke his jaw in four places -- defenseman Derian Hatcher.

Roenick, whose 513 goals are the third-most for a U.S.-born player in NHL history, will be honored at the Hall's Induction Ceremony at HSBC Arena in Buffalo on Thursday, and sitting next to him on the stage will be Derian Hatcher; his brother, Kevin Hatcher; five-time U.S. Olympic hockey team physician Dr. V. George Nagobads; and longtime USA Hockey administrator Art Berglund.

Kevin Hatcher is a five-time NHL all-star with plenty of his own credentials to burnish, but this 2010 Class undoubtedly is headlined by the interlocked duo of Roenick and Derian Hatcher.

Each has received accolades not just for their NHL statistics, but for their contributions to the U.S. National Team, achievements which more than warrant their inclusion in the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame.

Between the two of them, they have four Olympic team appearances, while Roenick represented the U.S. twice at the World Junior Championships and Hatcher was a member of two World Cup teams -- including the U.S. squad that pulled a stunning upset of Canada in the 1996 championship series.

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"When you get recognized for greatness in something, it's tremendous and a great honor," Roenick said. "This is definitely a day that I will cherish and a day that I'm excited about."

Regardless of the obvious reasons for both of these players to be inducted, their personal history is likely to draw some attention during Thursday's festivities.

That history dates to April 14, 1999, when Hatcher laid into Roenick, in what reports called retaliation for a high hit Roenick had given to Dallas forward Mike Modano three weeks earlier. Hatcher's hit on Roenick resulted in a jaw dislocated and broken in multiple places to go along with eight broken teeth for Roenick and a seven-game suspension for Hatcher.

As mentioned, though, Roenick proved to be a quick healer and returned for the first round of that spring's Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Amazingly, Hatcher's hit didn't bring about bad blood between the players. With the hit 11 years in their rear-view mirrors, Roenick and Hatcher have done little since to ruffle feathers on the topic.

That's been the case since Day 1, a fact that hasn't been lost on Kevin Hatcher.

"He (Roenick) handled that with so much class," Kevin said. "I happened to see an interview after that and he just said, 'It's a contact sport. That's the way Big Hatch plays. He's a physical player.'

"Jeremy would be the first one to tell you he'd run him over if he had his head down coming around the net at the same time."

Derian Hatcher was, indeed, a physical player, picking up 1,581 penalty minutes in a career that spanned 16 NHL seasons. One of the fiercest defensemen of his day, Hatcher used his 6-foot-5, 235-pound frame in intimidating and effective fashion, while also developing the leadership skills that eventually led him to become the first -- and only -- U.S.-born captain of a Stanley Cup champion just two months after his memorable run-in with Roenick. The Stars won the 1999 Stanley Cup against the Buffalo Sabres, winning the clinching game in the city that now will host Derian's Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

And if there is any player who can appreciate effective physicality, it's Roenick, who has made it clear he bears no ill will against Hatcher.

"I think it's funny, actually," Roenick said. "He and I had such great wars together. We were very passionate, and we wore our hearts on our sleeves. We played the game the way it's supposed to be played -- with grit and tenacity. I looked forward to playing Derian. I looked forward to going against him and battling hard."

Roenick, with 1,463 penalty minutes of his own in his 20-season NHL career, was no stranger to delivering or receiving physical contact. In fact, his jaw would be broken again in a game five years later.

The incident with Hatcher -- because of the talent of the players involved and the back story -- strikes a strong chord with players and fans alike.

It hardly would be surprising to see such a hit provide fodder for years of tension, but rather than engender disdain, the hit has given Hatcher and Roenick a strong measure of mutual respect, one that will be on display Thursday. "Anytime you hurt someone, most players absolutely feel remorse," Derian Hatcher said. "It's a hard-hitting game out there and Jeremy played much that same style. We were almost rivals in 1999 going back to the days in Chicago and in Phoenix. We always played hard against one another, and it led to some unfortunate stuff, but we've never said anything bad about each other, and I respect Jeremy Roenick, not only in the way he plays, but as a person."

According to Hatcher, in the "many, many" conversations during the past decade between the two the subject rarely has been brought up. Yet, with their upcoming induction Thursday, the elephant in the room may begin stomping. On the day the 2010 Class of the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame was announced, the two almost immediately were asked about the incident.

Since the two players always will be linked by that moment in time, there is an almost appropriate irony with the two of them being enshrined in the same class.

And for the man who endured the brunt of the hit, it may offer the chance to bust some chops of his own Thursday -- even if it won't be in the literal fashion.


"I think it's great," Roenick said. "I'm sure we'll have some fun with it."

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3 - 4 W	4	5	6	3 - 4 O	8	3 - 2 L
10	4 - 3 W	12	3 - 2 L	14	5 - 2 W	3 - 4 W
17	2 - 3 W	19	1 - 2 W	21	7:00 PM	7:30 PM
24	25	26	7:30 PM	28	7:30 PM	7:00 PM
31						


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