

= Keith Ballard =

Keith Galen Ballard (born November 26 , 1982) is an American former professional ice hockey defenseman who previously played in the National Hockey League with the Phoenix Coyotes , Florida Panthers , Vancouver Canucks and the Minnesota Wild . He played college hockey for the Minnesota Golden Gophers of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA) for three seasons . After his freshman year , he was selected 11th overall by the Buffalo Sabres in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft . Before he made his NHL debut , he was traded twice ? initially to the Colorado Avalanche , then to the Phoenix Coyotes . He played his professional rookie season in 2004 ? 05 with the Coyotes ' American Hockey League (AHL) affiliate , the Utah Grizzlies , then debuted with Phoenix the following season . After three years , he was traded to the Florida Panthers , where he spent two seasons before being dealt to Vancouver at the 2010 NHL Entry Draft . Internationally , Ballard has represented the United States in four World Championships , winning bronze in 2004 . He has also played in two junior tournaments ? the 2000 IIHF World U18 Championships and 2002 World Junior Championships .

= = Playing career = =

= = = Junior and college (1999 ? 2004) = = =

Ballard played two seasons at the junior level in the United States Hockey League (USHL) , initially with the United States National Development Team in 1999 ? 00 , then the Omaha Lancers the following season . He recorded 51 points over 56 games in 2000 ? 01 . With a league @-@ leading 22 goals among defensemen , he earned First Team All @-@ Star honors and a selection to the 2001 USHL All @-@ Star Game . In the post @-@ season , he helped the Lancers win the Clark Cup as league champions , scoring seven points in 10 playoff games .

In 2001 ? 02 , he began a three @-@ year tenure of college hockey with the Minnesota Golden Gophers of the WCHA , a conference within the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) . He joined a defensive corps in Minnesota that included future NHL players Jordan Leopold and Paul Martin . Ballard was a much @-@ anticipated freshman and was named the WCHA 's pre @-@ season rookie of the year . Making his collegiate debut on October 5 , 2001 , he notched two assists against the North Dakota Fighting Sioux . Ballard started his rookie campaign on a six @-@ game point streak that included two goals and four assists . Recording 10 goals and 23 points over 41 games total as a freshman , he earned WCHA All @-@ Rookie Team honors . In the first round of the subsequent WCHA playoffs , he scored the series @-@ clinching goal in overtime to eliminate North Dakota . The Golden Gophers advanced to the 2002 NCAA Championships , where they captured their first of back @-@ to @-@ back national titles . Ballard scored the first goal of the NCAA final against the Maine Black Bears , helping Minnesota to a 4 ? 3 win in overtime .

The following year , Ballard recorded a college career @-@ high 41 points over 45 games , fourth among NCAA defensemen and third in team scoring . He was named a WCHA All @-@ Academic and University of Minnesota Scholar Athlete for combined performance with the Golden Gophers and in classes . He helped the Golden Gophers to the Broadmoor Trophy as WCHA playoff champions and earned WCHA Final Five All @-@ Tournament Team honors after recording two assists and a + 4 rating in the final two games of the post @-@ season . The Gophers then defeated the New Hampshire Wildcats in the 2003 NCAA Final by a 5 ? 1 score to repeat as national champions . Ballard received NCAA West Regional All @-@ Star honors for his efforts during the tournament .

Ballard was named an alternate captain in his third year and produced 11 goals and 36 points over 37 games . His 0 @-@ 97 points @-@ per @-@ game average ranked second among NCAA defensemen , while his five game winning goals were second among all WCHA players and fifth in the NCAA . Ballard served as captain in place of Grant Potulny when the latter was sidelined with injury . Ballard was also sidelined for seven games during the campaign himself with a knee injury .

He was voted by his teammates as Minnesota 's most valuable player and received WCHA First All @-@ Star Team , WCHA All @-@ Tournament Team and NCAA West First All @-@ Star Team honors . Ballard was also one of 10 finalists for the Hobey Baker Award , given to the NCAA 's top men 's ice hockey player (it was awarded to Junior Lessard of the Minnesota @-@ Duluth Bulldogs) . The Golden Gophers failed to defend their national championship , however , losing their regional final to Minnesota @-@ Duluth .

Ballard left the Golden Gophers seventh all @-@ time among team defensemen with 33 goals . He was also the 74th player in team history to notch 100 points , which also ranked him 11th among defensemen .

= = = Phoenix Coyotes (2004 ? 08) = = =

Ballard was selected in the first round , 11th overall , by the Buffalo Sabres in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft . The choice was seen as a surprise by draft observers , as he was projected to be a late first @-@ round to second @-@ round pick . Ballard himself professed the early selection to be unexpected , saying he was ready to be drafted between the 20th and 40th positions . Scouting reports listed him as a puck @-@ rushing offensive defenceman with comparisons to Phil Housley . Before making his NHL debut , he was traded twice . He was initially dealt by Buffalo to the Colorado Avalanche on July 3 , 2003 , for Steven Reinprecht . The following year , he was traded again to the Phoenix Coyotes , along with defenseman Derek Morris , for forward Chris Gratton , defenseman Ossi Väänänen and a second @-@ round selection in the 2005 draft .

Ballard signed with Phoenix a year later to an entry @-@ level contract worth an annual \$ 1 @. @ 2 million over three years , including bonuses . With his NHL contract , he decided to forgo his senior year of college hockey . The decision was spurred by his performance at the 2004 World Championships with Team USA , competing with NHL veterans . Ballard indicated that he would only leave the University of Minnesota if he was offered the maximum allowable contract for a rookie , as designated by the collective bargaining agreement of the time , which he received .

Due to the NHL lockout , he made his professional debut in the AHL with the Coyotes ' minor league affiliate , the Utah Grizzlies in 2004 ? 05 . He notched two goals and 20 points over 60 games in his professional rookie campaign . As NHL resumed play the following season , Ballard played his first game with the Coyotes on October 5 , 2005 , against the Vancouver Canucks . He scored his first NHL goal in his debut , beating goaltender Dan Cloutier . Ballard finished with 8 goals and 39 points as a rookie ; both remain career highs . He led all NHL defensemen in shorthanded goals with three . Ballard was sidelined for 13 games in his second NHL season due to a bone fracture in his hand , suffered while blocking a shot during a game on October 9 , 2006 . He went on to record 27 points in 69 games . In the off @-@ season , he was re @-@ signed on August 29 , 2007 , to a two @-@ year contract . In 2007 ? 08 , Ballard recorded a career @-@ low 21 points .

= = = Florida Panthers (2008 ? 10) = = =

During the 2008 NHL Entry Draft , he was dealt , along with defenseman Nick Boynton and a second @-@ round pick in the draft , to the Florida Panthers in exchange for forward Olli Jokinen . Upon trading for Ballard , Florida head coach Jacques Martin heralded him as the club 's number @-@ two defenseman , behind Jay Bouwmeester . Prior to the 2008 ? 09 season , Ballard signed a six @-@ year , \$ 25 @. @ 2 million contract extension with the Panthers . The deal came with a season remaining on his existing contract , previously signed with the Coyotes .

Ballard went on to tally 34 points during his first campaign with Florida in 2008 ? 09 . The following season , on November 30 , 2009 , Ballard was involved in an on @-@ ice incident that injured his own teammate , goaltender Tomá? Vokoun . After being on the ice for a goal during a game against the Atlanta Thrashers , Ballard aimed to smash his stick against the post and mistakenly hit Vokoun in the mask . Vokoun was taken from the ice on a stretcher and suffered a cut on his ear that required stitches ; he missed two games before returning to the lineup . Ballard , who apologized to

Vokoun following the game , was not disciplined by the Panthers or NHL . He went on to match his career @-@ high eight goals and added 20 assists for 28 points in his second season with the Panthers . He also ranked third in the league in blocked shots with 201 . Ballard had played parts of the season with a hip injury . After completing the campaign , he underwent the second hip surgery of his career in May 2010 to repair a stress fracture and remove a cyst .

= = = Vancouver Canucks (2010 ? 13) = = =

On June 25 , 2010 , during the 2010 NHL Entry Draft , Ballard was traded to the Vancouver Canucks along with Victor Oreskovich , for Michael Grabner , Steve Bernier , and Vancouver 's first round pick , the 25th overall selection , used to select Quinton Howden . After spending two months of the off @-@ season on crutches while recovering from surgery , he reported to the Canucks ' training camp , but struggled in the pre @-@ season . Four games into the regular season , he suffered a concussion after being hit into the boards by Los Angeles Kings forward Brad Richardson on October 16 , 2010 . He was subsequently sidelined for five games . Upon returning to the lineup , however , his play continued to struggle . Averaging 13 minutes of ice time a game , he was eventually taken out of the lineup for four games in November by Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault . It marked the first time in his career he was a healthy scratch . After being re @-@ insterted into the lineup , he scored his first goal as a Canuck in a 6 ? 1 win against the San Jose Sharks on November 26 . Several months later , Ballard suffered a sprained medial collateral ligament (MCL) in his right knee during a game against the Ottawa Senators on February 7 , 2011 . The injury resulted from opposing forward Milan Michalek tripping him from behind , which Canucks general manager Mike Gillis pointed out did not occur anywhere near the puck , alluding to the play as illegal and disrespectful . Ballard finished his first regular season with career lows in games played (65) , goals (2) , assists (5) , points (7) and average ice time per game (15 minutes and 14 seconds) . His individual struggles came amidst a franchise record season for the Canucks , who won the Presidents ' Trophy as the NHL 's regular season champion for the first time in team history . Entering the playoffs as the first seed in the West , the Canucks advanced past the Chicago Blackhawks , Nashville Predators and San Jose Sharks to qualify for the 2011 Stanley Cup Finals . Facing the Boston Bruins , Vancouver lost the Stanley Cup in Game 7 . Over the team 's 25 playoff games , Ballard dressed for 10 . Playing only one game of the final two rounds , he dropped in the depth chart behind Aaron Rome and rookie Chris Tanev .

Ballard continued to be used as a third @-@ pairing defenceman in his second season with Vancouver . He missed five contests in November and December 2011 due to a back injury , before sustaining a season @-@ ending concussion on February 5 , 2012 . Initially undetected , the injury was caused by two separate hits during a game against the Colorado Avalanche . He remained in the lineup for the following contest before being diagnosed with the injury . His season ended with 1 goal and 7 points over 47 games . His third season with the Canucks was shortened by the 2012 ? 13 NHL lockout . When the season started Ballard was again on the Canucks third pairing with Tanev . Early in the season the two were the Canucks ' most consistent pairing . An injury to Kevin Bieksa allowed Andrew Alberts to get into the line @-@ up and split the Ballard @-@ Tanev paring . After Bieksa 's return it was Ballard who was removed from the line @-@ up becoming a healthy scratch . In late March Vancouver suffered several injuries up front to help fill the void Ballard returned to the line @-@ up as a forward . He played three games before suffering a broken foot . Though he was healthy by the playoffs Vancouver opted to play Alberts and rookie Frank Corrado in the first round lost to San Jose . He finished the year playing in 36 games and recording two assists .

= = = Minnesota Wild (2013 ? 15) = = =

With the salary cap decreasing in the off @-@ season Vancouver needed to unload salary . Ballard had two years remaining on his contract with an annual value \$ 4 @. 2 million . The Canucks tried to trade Ballard in an attempt to avoid using a compliance buyout on him . When that failed the team

placed him on waivers . He cleared waivers before Vancouver ultimately bought him out . Two days after becoming a free agent he signed a two @-@ year \$ 3 million contract with the Minnesota Wild .

In his second season with the Wild Ballard was hit by the New York Islanders ' Matt Martin after making a pass . The hit was delivered as Ballard turned away from Martin . Ballard 's head struck a glass partition and as he fell his head bounced off the ice . He lay on the ice for a few minutes before being able to leave the ice on his own . Ballard suffered a concussion and multiple facial fractures as a result . He was taken to Regions Hospital for evaluation and observation and released the next day . There was no penalty or suspension in result of the hit .

As a free agent in the off @-@ season , Ballard was still suffering from post @-@ concussion syndrome and opted to end his professional career to pursue studies in sport science at the University of Minnesota .

= = International play = =

Ballard made his international debut with Team USA at the 2000 IIHF World U18 Championships in Switzerland . He was named to the squad while playing in the National Under @-@ 18 Development Program for the 1999 ? 2000 season . He contributed a goal and an assist in six games , as the United States finished in eighth place . Two years later , Ballard was named to the under @-@ 20 squad for the 2001 World Junior Championships in the Czech Republic . He played in seven games , recording a goal and an assist . The United States lost in the quarterfinal to Russia and went on to place in fifth after defeating Sweden 3 ? 2 in a consolation match .

Following his third year with the Minnesota Golden Gophers , Ballard debuted with the United States men 's team for the 2004 World Championships in the Czech Republic . He was named to the squad after forward Scott Gomez withdrew himself due to personal reasons . As the lone NCAA player on the national squad , he helped the United States to a bronze medal finish . His lone goal of the tournament and first career goal in men 's international competition came during a 7 ? 1 round @-@ robin win against Ukraine .

Three years later , Ballard began a three @-@ year stretch of consecutive appearances at the World Championships . He recorded an international career @-@ high three assists at the 2007 tournament in Russia , as the United States were eliminated in a 5 ? 4 shootout loss to Finland in the quarterfinal . Competing in Quebec City and Halifax , Canada , the following year , Ballard recorded two assists in five games while ranking seventh among team defensemen in average ice time per game . The United States finished in sixth place , losing in the quarterfinal to Finland . Ballard made his second bronze medal game appearance with the United States at the 2009 IIHF World Championship in Switzerland , but lost to Sweden by a 4 ? 2 score . He contributed a goal and two assists in nine games while ranking second on the squad in plus @-@ minus with a + 3 rating and sixth among team defensemen in average ice time per game .

= = Playing style = =

Ballard is a two @-@ way defenseman , capable of contributing both offensively and defensively . Known for his hard hitting , specifically with hip checks , he led his club in hits during his first five years in the NHL . He is also proficient in shot @-@ blocking . Offensively , Ballard is noted as a quick and smooth skater , making him able to start plays from the defensive zone . At the 2012 Canucks SuperSkills Competition , he won the fastest skater segment by circling the rink in 13 @.@ 440 seconds . He has a reputation as a player with intensity and a competitive edge .

= = Personal life = =

Ballard was born in Baudette , Minnesota , to parents Steve and Joanne . He has a sister , Jessie . His family runs a fishing resort at Lake of the Woods in Minnesota , founded by Ballard 's grandparents in 1961 .

Ballard left home following his sophomore year of high school to pursue his hockey career with the U.S. National Development Team in Ann Arbor , Michigan . During his time with the Omaha Lancers , he graduated from Millard North High School in Omaha , Nebraska . He was a multi @-@ sport athlete during high school , having earned an All @-@ Conference selection as a fullback and linebacker playing football and finishing as Conference championship runner @-@ up as a golfer . Ballard and his wife have a daughter who was born in May 2010 .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = Regular season and playoffs = = =

= = = International = = =

= = Awards = =