

# Canadian Celebrity Readers

# Famous Male Athletes

## Grades 4-8

**Written by Ruth Solski**  
**Illustrated by Dan Day**

**About the author:**

Ruth Solski was an educator for 30 years. She has written many educational resources over the years and is the founder of S&S Learning Materials. As a writer, her main goal is to provide teachers with a useful tool they can implement in their classrooms to bring the joy of learning to children.

**ISBN: 978-1-55495-010-2**

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Published in Canada by:  
S&S Learning Materials  
15 Dairy Avenue  
Napanee, Ontario  
K7R 1M4  
[www.sslearning.com](http://www.sslearning.com)

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**W**

ho would have ever imagined that a scrawny little kid from Brantford, with the name of Wayne Gretzky, would develop into a scoring machine in the world of professional hockey. Today, and for years to come, Wayne Gretzky, nicknamed 'The Great One,' will be considered the greatest hockey player ever.

Wayne was born on January 26, 1961, to Walter and Phyllis Gretzky in Brantford, Ontario. At the age of two, his father had him at a local park rink learning to skate. Later on, his father made him a rink in the family backyard. It was here that he acquired and practised his skating, scoring, and stick handling skills under his father's supervision.

When Wayne was six, he began to play peewee hockey with ten year olds. During his first season, he only scored one goal and cried when he found out he was the only player on the team not to win a trophy. As a result of this disappointment, Wayne was determined to improve and practised faithfully. In no time, Wayne developed into a scoring machine and at the age of ten, he had racked up an amazing 378 goals in 82 games.

Wayne flew through Canada's junior leagues and at 17, he was playing with the Indianapolis Racers of the World Hockey Association. When the Racers folded after five seasons, Gretzky was sold to the Edmonton Oilers. In Edmonton, Wayne became the most dominant player in the history of the game. Here, Wayne was playing with phenomenal hockey players. During his rookie year with the Oilers, Gretzky became the youngest player to ever score 50 goals during one season. He won the Hart Trophy as the league's MVP and tied with Marcel Dionne for the league's lead in points.

In the 1980 to 1981 season, Wayne won his first of seven scoring titles and broke Bobby Orr's assists record with 109 assists. In the same year, Wayne shattered Phil Esposito's scoring record of 76 goals by scoring 92 times. In the same year, he earned 212 points. This was the first of four times that he'd score more than 200 points and he still holds the record.

Gretzky had a style all his own. It was unique and difficult to penetrate. The area behind the opposition's goal was referred to as Gretzky's



office. It was from this position that Gretzky made perfect passes for goals. He was also a great penalty killer, often scoring when his team was shorthanded.

In 1983, the Oilers went to the Stanley Cup finals and lost horribly in four straight games to the Islanders. The Oilers rebounded the next year to win the Stanley Cup and continued to for the next four years. In 1988, after the Oilers had won their fifth Stanley Cup, Gretzky gathered his teammates at center ice for an on-ice group photo which started a hockey tradition for every team at all levels and it was the last time that Wayne would wear an Oilers' sweater.

In August of the same year, it was announced that Wayne Gretzky had been traded to the Los Angeles Kings in one of the most lucrative trades in NHL history. Fans and media were not very happy as their star hockey player was heading for the United States and would never wear a Canadian team sweater again in the NHL. The Oilers were never the same, but the LA Kings were sold out every game. While playing for the Kings, Gretzky scored his 802nd goal to pass Gordie Howe's all-time leading score as well as his 1,852nd point to pass Howe as an all time point-getter in the league.

After the Kings, Wayne played for St. Louis for a short while and then signed with the New York Rangers. Although Wayne still scored well, he found the team was only mediocre and decided to retire in 1999. At the same time the NHL also retired his number 99. Not only is Wayne Gretzky considered one of the greatest players to represent the NHL, he is also one of the finest men hockey has ever known. ★



# Wayne Gretzky

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reading Skills

Answer the following questions with complete sentences.

1. Does the size of a hockey player make any difference in his ability to perform well in the sport?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why were so many people doubtful about Wayne's ability to play NHL hockey?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What hockey skills did Gretzky focus on while he was growing up?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. During his hockey career, which team do you think provided him with the most rewards and enjoyment? Tell why.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What hockey tradition did Gretzky begin when he played for the Edmonton Oilers?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What event was the turning point in Gretzky's career and his life?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Why were people upset when they heard about Wayne leaving the Oilers?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Which famous hockey legends had their records broken by Gretzky?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you think Wayne Gretzky enjoyed his hockey career as much when he played in the United States?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary Skills

A. The word "scrawny" begin with the blend "scr". Record the "scr" words in the box on the lines beside their meanings.

scrunch	scrimp	scrounge
scroll	scrabble	scribble
scribe	scraggly	scramble

1. to crunch or squeeze \_\_\_\_\_

2. to be very cheap \_\_\_\_\_

3. a roll of special paper \_\_\_\_\_

4. to mooch; sponge; beg \_\_\_\_\_

5. a game using letters \_\_\_\_\_

6. to write quickly \_\_\_\_\_

7. one who writes \_\_\_\_\_

8. to mix together \_\_\_\_\_

9. unkempt; shaggy \_\_\_\_\_

B. Rewrite each group of words to form a sentence about Wayne Gretzky.

1. perhaps, Wayne, Gretzky, the, most, childhood, lived, famous, athlete, any, of

\_\_\_\_\_

2. was, when, Wayne, he, fourteen, and, decided, to, Brantford, leave, because, players, made, jealous, him, parents, unhappy, and, Toronto, Nats, play, the, for, to

\_\_\_\_\_

3. most, was, the, Wayne's, game, versus, Union, Game, 2, memorable, Soviet, during 1987, Cup, the Canada, the

\_\_\_\_\_

**A**lexandre Despatie is a remarkable Canadian diver, having won the Canadian Senior Championships 36 times. He was born on June 8, 1985 in Montreal, Quebec and was raised in Laval. Alex began diving at the age of five in his family's backyard pool. Later, he trained at the Club Aquatique in Montreal. He trained on the 1 m and 3 m springboard and on the 10 m platform or tower. His family was very sports-minded and encouraged and supported him throughout his career.

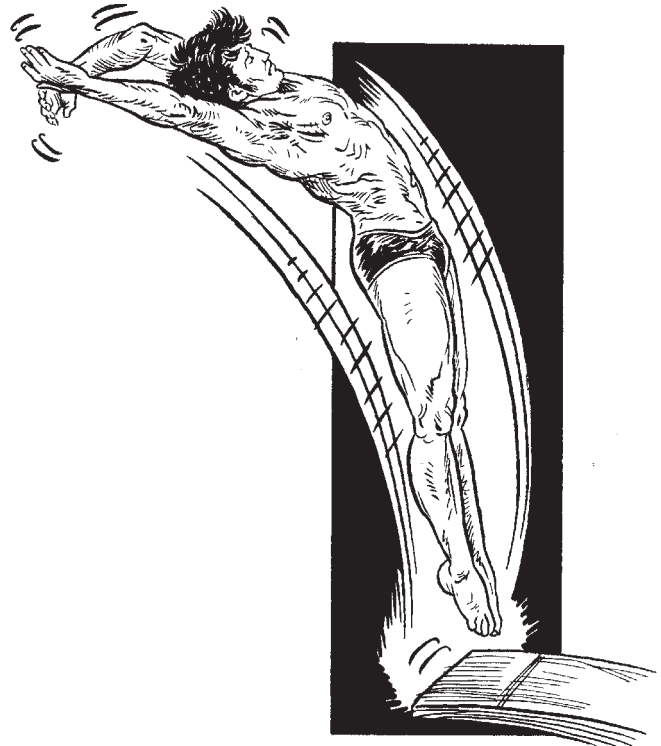
In 1998, Despatie gained public attention at the Commonwealth Games, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, when he won a gold medal on the 10 m platform with a score of perfect tens, at the age of 13. This achievement made it into the 2000 Guinness Book of World Records. At the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia in the year 2000, Despatie finished in 4th place on the 10 m platform.

At the World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan in 2001, Despatie won a silver medal in the 10 m platform. In the same event at the World Diving Championships in Barcelona, Spain, he won a gold medal, receiving a score of 107.1 for his last dive, a new record.

In 2002, at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England, Despatie won a gold medal in the 3 m springboard event. The following year, Despatie won three gold medals at the Pan American Games in Santa Domingo in the Dominican Republic.

Expectations were high at the Olympics in 2004, in Athens, Greece. Alexandre did win the silver medal in the men's 3 m springboard event, but finished out of the medals in the 10 m platform and placed fourth. It was expected that Alexandre would win silver or gold in the platform and not place in the springboard.

When the World Aquatic Championships came to Montreal in 2005, Despatie would be performing in front of a home crowd. He did not disappoint his fans. He became World Champion on the 3 m springboard with a world record score of 813.60 points. In his second event, which was the 1 m springboard, he finished with a world record score of 489.69, winning the event. This victory meant that he had won FINA World Titles on the springboard and platform.



At the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia in 2006, Despatie won three gold medals. He won the 1 m springboard, the 3 m springboard, and the 3 m synchronized diving event with Arturo Miranda. He also won a bronze medal in the 10 m platform.

At the 2007, World Aquatic Championships in Melbourne, Australia, Despatie competed against the best divers in the world, who were all preparing for the 2008 Olympics to be held in Beijing, China. He finished 8th in the 10 m platform event and won silver medals in the 3 m springboard and 3 m synchro with his partner, Arturo Miranda.

At the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Despatie won the silver medal in the 3 m springboard event and finished in 5th place in the 3 m synchro event.

Since 1999, Alexandre has been an ambassador for McDonald's and he participates actively in the Go Active™ program that emphasizes a healthy lifestyle and is involved in the various non-profit causes supported by McDonald's, such as Ronald McDonald House Charities. In return, McDonald's supports Alexandre for his values and personality.

Alexandre Despatie has had a very successful diving career and he has made Canada and Canadians very proud of his dedication to his sport and his achievements. ★



# Alexandre Despatie

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reading Skills

Record the name of the place, the competition, and the year in which each event took place during Alexandre Despatie's diving career.

- Alexandre won a silver medal in the 3 m springboard event and placed 5th in the 3 m synchro with his partner.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- He brought home three gold medals from this competition in the 1 m, 3 m springboard, and the 10 m synchronized events.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- During this competition, Alexandre competed against some of the best divers in the world.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Alexandre won the 10 m platform with a score of perfect tens at the age of 13.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Despatie finished in 4th place in the 10 m platform.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- At this competition, Alexandre won a gold medal in the 10 m platform with a score of 107.1 on his last dive and set a record.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- At this competition, Alexandre won a Silver Medal at an event that he was not expected to win and placed 4th in the event that he was expected to win.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Alexandre performed well in front of a home crowd on the 3 m and the 1 m springboard.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary Skills

Match each word that pertains to the sport of diving to its meaning.

acrobatics	pike	twists
platform	entry	acrobatics
take off	flight	somersaults
rotations		

- knees straight but a tight bend \_\_\_\_\_
- turning in a circle \_\_\_\_\_
- to jump from the board \_\_\_\_\_
- revolutions, turns \_\_\_\_\_
- feats of bodily skill \_\_\_\_\_
- rolling over and over \_\_\_\_\_
- a diver goes into the water \_\_\_\_\_
- going up in the air \_\_\_\_\_
- a raised area for diving \_\_\_\_\_
- able to move easily \_\_\_\_\_

## Research Skills

Using the Internet, find out the names of the various dives performed by a competitive diver and how they are completed. Star the ones that are the most difficult to complete. \_\_\_\_\_

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