

AMAZING HOCKEY STORIES

AUSTON MATTHEWS

Lorna Schultz Nicholson

Illustrations by David Bishop



Scholastic Canada Ltd.

To the Matthews team: Brian, Ema, Judd, Mollie, Rachel.
You helped get this book to my readers.
— *L.S.N.*

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Scholastic New Zealand Limited

Private Bag 94407, Botany, Manukau 2163, New Zealand

Scholastic Children's Books

1 London Bridge, London SE1 9BG, UK

www.scholastic.ca

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Auston Matthews / Lorna Schultz Nicholson ; illustrations by David Bishop.

Names: Schultz Nicholson, Lorna, author | Bishop, David (Illustrator), illustrator

Series: Amazing hockey stories.

Description: Series statement: Amazing hockey stories

Identifiers: Canadiana 20240529502 | ISBN 9781039710221 (softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Matthews, Auston—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Hockey players—United States— Biography—Juvenile literature. | LCGFT: Biographies.

Classification: LCC GV848.5.M375 S38 2025 | DDC j796.962092—dc23

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THE DESERT SNIPER

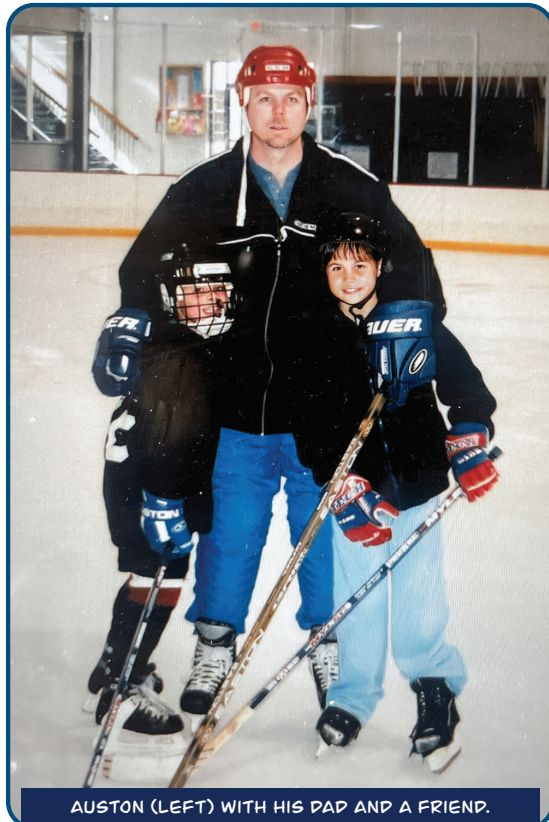
Auston Matthews grew up in the Arizona desert where there's a lot of sand and little ice. Kids there mostly play football, basketball, baseball and golf. As a kid, Auston loved playing baseball, but he also discovered a passion for the less popular sport of hockey. Even though he didn't have the opportunity to play shinny outdoors, or even street hockey, he still forged his own unique path with the support of his family.

How he got there may have been unusual, but Auston has become the captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs — and the best goal scorer in the National Hockey League. He has a blistering shot, and he can also make quick decisions in the offensive zone. He picks his holes with speed and accuracy. And that wickedly hard wrist shot combined with those sniper skills help him score . . . game after game after game.

Auston is also proud of his Mexican American heritage. On October 14, 2023, at the Scotiabank Arena in Toronto, Auston did what Auston does best. In that game against the Minnesota Wild, he scored a hat trick and won first star of the game! After the game he saluted the fans with his stick. But then

he spotted a young boy behind the glass, wearing a sombrero, and holding a sign that said, “Mexican roots. Leafs. Go Auston!” Auston immediately skated over and passed his game stick over the glass for the boy.

So . . . how did a kid from the desert grow up to be one of hockey’s biggest superstars?



AUSTON (LEFT) WITH HIS DAD AND A FRIEND.
HE SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS ON THE ICE AS A KID.

EARLY YEARS

Born in San Ramon, California, on September 17, 1997, Auston Taylour Matthews was only two months old when he moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, with his mom, dad and older sister, Alexandria. He also has another sister, Breyana, who is five years younger than him.

Auston's father, Brian, was a baseball player who pitched for Loyola Marymount University in Southern California until an injury forced him to stop. Auston's mother, Ema, was born in Hermosillo, Mexico, and was working as a flight attendant when she first met Brian, who worked for an airline in Los Angeles.

Brian's brother lived in Scottsdale too. Auston's Uncle Bill had season tickets for the Phoenix Coyotes. NHL hockey first came to Arizona in 1996, a year before Auston was born, when the original Winnipeg Jets relocated to Phoenix and were renamed the Coyotes.

Auston would go to Coyotes games with his uncle and dad and sit on their knees. As a toddler, Auston loved watching the Zamboni cleaning the ice.

Sadly, Uncle Bill passed away from cystic fibrosis when Auston was still young, but his dad continued

taking him to Coyotes games. Afterwards, Auston's mother would often find him under their table, playing pretend hockey with two pencils and a bottle cap while mimicking the announcers.

Auston's parents told young Auston he could play two sports. When he picked hockey in addition to baseball, they realized how much the Coyotes had influenced him. They signed him up for a learn-to-skate program, and much to their surprise, he started skating right away. At just four and a half years old, Auston started to play with the Junior Coyotes.



AUSTON (RIGHT) PLAYS A GAME FOR THE JUNIOR COYOTES. EVEN AT A YOUNG AGE, AUSTON'S SKATING AND STICKHANDLING SKILLS WERE TOP-NOTCH.

BASEBALL BAT OR HOCKEY SKATES?

Auston loved playing baseball too. His family thought that would be his main sport because both his dad and grandpop played.

Auston and his dad often played catch and practised batting. One of Auston's favourite positions was catcher, and he liked hitting home runs. Although he was good at baseball, he sometimes found it too slow. He liked the speed of hockey better, and he especially loved scoring goals.

Along with playing on the Junior Coyotes, Auston practised his skills in an arena called Ozzie Ice. Ozzie Ice had two small ice sheets, one that was real ice and one that was made of a new synthetic ice technology. Both of these ice surfaces were smaller than half a sheet of regular ice, so all the games had to be three-on-three. Ozzie Ice was where Auston learned how to use his hands to stickhandle, how to turn on his skates to get through bodies and how to protect the puck. There was no bodychecking at Ozzie Ice, so Auston was allowed to play with older kids as well. He played countless games on those small ice surfaces.

For the 2003–04 season, when Auston was six, he played for the Vosha Mustang Mites. He got his first

taste of winning when they became the Sonoran Youth Hockey Champions that year. Even back then, his coach marvelled at how Auston could shoot the puck from centre ice and hit the net!

FUN HOCKEY SKILLS

When he was seven, Auston attended a hockey camp in Phoenix to improve his skating and skills. The instructor, a former pro player, had fled to Mexico from Ukraine when it was part of the Soviet Union. He had helped build Mexico's struggling national hockey program, and now he taught developmental skills camps for youth hockey players.

This instructor's methods were different. Auston's dad watched from the sidelines, curious. He saw Auston jumping, spinning and twirling. Some people thought it was strange, but Auston's smile was huge. He thrived with this repetitive style of training. If Auston was happy, so were his parents. That's all that counted to them. They wanted him to have fun.



**AUSTON WORE #14 FOR
THE VOSHA MUSTANG
MITES.**