

Brandon Nolan (Son of Ted Nolan)

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Believing he was subjected to a "racist comment" and "treated like a criminal" a native-Canadian hockey player wants answers why he was "harassed" and denied entry into Canada at a border crossing this week. The Assembly of First Nations has received the complaint, high-profile Toronto attorney Calvin Barry has been retained and the Canadian Border Services Agency has launched an investigation.

What everybody wants to know is what it was about Brandon Nolan that border officers at the crossing at the Ivy Lea Bridge, between Brockville and Kingston, didn't like? Whatever it was, for almost two hours Monday, Nolan, 24, property of the Carolina Hurricanes, was a man without a country.

"It was really weird," Nolan said in an interview yesterday. "As a citizen in this country, I was kicked out of my country." Or at least not let back in.

The former Oshawa General, and the eldest son of New York Islanders coach Ted Nolan, was returning to his own home to Whitby with his girlfriend, Stephanie Antalfy, from his parent's home on Long Island in New York when he pulled his dad's BMW up to the border point near Lansdowne, Ont. A routine questioning at the border seems to have turned into something that may end up going before the Human Rights Commission.

Nolan, who played for the Bridgeport Sound Tigers in the American Hockey League last season, documented the entire incident after he was asked to pull over and talk to two officers.

"They were both questioning me about the licence plates on my car. I was told that I needed to pay duty on my car and register it before I entered Canada, otherwise they would not allow us to cross. "I responded, 'I have done this (crossed the border with American plates) 30 or 40 times.' Officer No. 2 remarked, 'Then the border made 30 or 40 mistakes.' "

Later another officer said, "Where's Cornwall?" Nolan, who says he has never before had any contact with or ill feeling toward police, took offence to the comment -- saying officers were "snickering" and "laughing" and he felt like they were stereotyping him in with the cigarette and alcohol trafficking that is alleged to go on in that region. "I have never been to Cornwall," he told them. In his statement he wrote: "I took offence to this statement as it is a racist comment due to the native population residing in that area. He seemed to be insinuating that the border officials in Cornwall would bend the rules for a fellow native Canadian."

Later Nolan explained he is a professional hockey player and routinely crosses the border. This time though he says his driver's licence was handed back to him and he was rudely told to "go back to the U.S." Ironically the U.S. immigration people "treated us great" and sent him back -- believing he should be entitled to enter his homeland. It did not work. Nolan said upon his return a Canadian officer said, "Is he still standing there? Ignore him." He tried to explain that he was "employed by the New York Islanders until April" and that he just recently signed a contract with Carolina Hurricanes for September 2007.

"Where is your green card then?" he was asked. "I showed my native status card and told him that a green card is not necessary for me to work in the U.S. His response was, 'I know what the status card is. It's the U.S. that accepted that agreement, but we don't.'

"I said that for the last five years I have been playing hockey and crossing the border with my status card and do not need a green card. I also showed him my New York licence with the U.S. residence on the card. "He replied to me by saying, 'That does not prove that you live in the U.S., and that (pointing to my native status card) means nothing to me.' "

Perhaps some sensitivity training is in order down there. Or maybe some lessons on simple manners. It's appalling and hopefully security video will be pulled to determine what did go on here. No matter what the technical issue the officers may have been concerned about, if this happened like Nolan describes this treatment is reprehensible.

An apology may be in order but the officers down there will get the opportunity to tell their side of it. "We are looking into the allegations to determine what happened," said border services spokesman Chris Kealey.

Meanwhile, on the Garden River reserve last night, Brandon's parents, Ted and Sandra Nolan, were also upset and shocked. "I know Ted went through this kind of thing when he was younger, but Brandon never has," said Sandra.

Ted Nolan said, "No person, native or any visible minority," should be subjected to this. "We have come too far for that," he said. The Assembly of First Nations may have more to say today. "They seemed to be on huge power trips," said Brandon, who said a call to a friend who works at the Peace Bridge at Fort Erie is the only reason he was finally admitted.

"Nobody down there seemed to want to just go inside and talk about it. I mean we are citizens. We were treated very rudely. "It was humiliating."