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## Stars' Modano at a career crossroads

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By Josh Brewster - NHL.com Correspondent

When Mike Modano looks to the future, he sees options branching off in different directions. In essence, Modano can opt to continue his hockey career, and if so, he must see if that future continues in Dallas. Or, he can look to a future with his skates packed away.

Modano, the highest-scoring U.S.-born player in NHL history, stands at a professional crossroads as the regular season ends. He's accomplished much in his career, including being a U.S. Olympian, a Stanley Cup champion in 1999 and a pioneer who helped grow the game in Texas.

"I think I'll have to contemplate it," Modano told NHL.com of his decision. "I'll really have to sit back and think about what I want to do. Do I want to try it another year, go through the summer's training getting ready for another year? Plus, I have to worry about a contract. So, there are some different variables playing into it than (previously)."

"Mike has earned the right to figure out what he wants to do," Stars General Manager Joe Nieuwendyk told NHL.com. "There is no question that he has a lot of game in him."

"I've always prided myself on longevity, how long I've played," Modano said. "It goes fast, and life's short, so (I'm) very laid back and go with the flow. I didn't care whether we won 8-2 or lost 8-2, (I kept) an even keel and the next day did the same thing over and over again."

Modano, who turns 40 on June 7, told a Dallas radio station last week that he did receive some trade inquiries from playoff-bound clubs, but felt the Stars, still in playoff contention at the time, remain his top priority.

"There were a handful of teams. Washington, Philly and Boston were asking and wondering what I would do," Modano told 1310 The Ticket. "I couldn't have left with just being just one point out."

Modano's contract expires at the end of this season. Having earned substantial millions after 21 years, a retired Modano might consider taking the leap into management or ownership, especially considering Stars owner Tom Hicks -- one of Modano's biggest fans over the years -- is looking to sell the club.

"I've always wanted to get involved in the ownership side and management side," Modano told NHL.com. "It depends. Our situation is up in the air in Dallas where we're not sure what's going to happen ownership-wise. (Promoting) the game in Dallas and being a part of that push with the Dallas Stars, I think I'd be comfortable with."

Modano already is in business as co-owner of "Hully & Mo's" sports-inspired restaurant in Uptown Dallas, which he owns with Brett Hull.

Modano, whose 556 goals and 1,355 points in 1,454 games make him the top U.S. goal- and point-scorer in NHL history has, since transferring the club's captaincy to 31-year-old Brenden Morrow in 2006, entered into a different role, more checking and special teams play than top-line duty.

"He was the first guy to congratulate me when the captaincy was changed even though he wasn't real big on it," Morrow told NHL.com. "He handled it with class. Being a top-minute guy and seeing his role reduced to checking and special teams, (he) has been real professional and first class."

"People see the flash and the finesse that he has on the ice, but they don't get to see the hard work he puts in ahead of time to prepare for that."

"I had some good days and bad days, there were some days where I felt, '(Was I) in the right situation?'" Modano said of his late-career transition, which echoes the role played by Steve Yzerman in his final seasons with Detroit. "In the right position, I could still have contributed and put up some decent numbers. But there are transition periods that go on, you have to get other players acclimated, because there will come a time when I do leave. So, with that you have to let go of some stuff."

"That's what I like about (Modano)," Nieuwendyk said. "He hasn't changed since the day I met him. He still comes to the rink the same way as he always has, even though his role has changed. He's been a third- or fourth-line guy at times, but still does so many things effectively."

Long before his three Olympic experiences (1998, 2002, 2006) yielded him a silver medal ('02), Modano was an elite talent for USA Hockey and its national development program, twice appearing in the World Junior Championships.

"Since Day 1 it was always exciting to have a chance to play with the other players in the country that were the best

players and be on the same ice," Modano said of his early years with the likes of Jeremy Roenick and Tony Amonte. "It was a lot of fun. We grew up together. We were fairly young when we were introduced. We spent most of our careers knowing each other and playing with each other and having some pretty good competitions when we went back to our NHL teams."

Ken Baker, author of "They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven," was a goaltender for those clubs, and remembers a precocious young Modano who dressed for success, a trait that may suit him just fine should he choose the road that includes management or ownership.

"Modano would show up to games in a suit, while I was lucky to have a tie or a hand-me-down blazer," Baker remembers. "He actually came to our games with a briefcase and had an agent."

In 1996, Modano, a hero and role model for countless young U.S.-born players, appeared in the World Cup of Hockey, where Team USA defeated Canada in a shocking comeback, which Modano called "an unbelievable tournament."

"He'll hold his head high and realize the impact he had on a lot of young American kids coming through the ranks," Nieuwendyk said.

"I think everyone will remember Mike Modano as a graceful skater with that sweater flowing in the wind. That's probably how he'll sail out," Nieuwendyk said, smiling. "That's the vision that I have of him."