

## Report: Darren Pang

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During the NHL's work stoppage because of the owners lock-out with the players, I have spent a great deal of time reading coaches books and the different philosophies and strategies when it comes to the great characters we have in the NHL that stand behind the benches.

As a player, I have to admit, I didn't quite have the same respect for coaches as I do now. I believe that is pretty normal. As an athlete, you have to be absorbed in your own play and how you can make a difference. I never thought that coaches were the difference when it came to who won and who lost the game. If the players played well then the team won. I always believed that excuses were for losers, or for athletes that didn't want to look in the mirror and blame their actions for a loss, but instead find a way out.

I am embarrassed to tell you that in one of my very 1st National broadcasts on ESPN featuring the Detroit Red Wings, I had the audacity to say that coaches are the most overrated aspect in hockey. I went on to say that they have little or no part in the outcome of the game, and that the players always decide that. There is plenty of merit to that statement and I am sure that the players that were watching the game really liked that comment. But I sure had a lot to learn about the "other" side of this game. The coach behind the bench of the Red Wings was none other than the immortal Hall of Famer, Scotty Bowman.

The next time I saw the Wings, their assistant coach, Barry Smith, took me aside and reminded me of what I said and that Scotty had seen and heard the tape of the game. He didn't even look at me that next time I saw him. Not even a peek towards me!

Again, at the time I didn't think the statement was that far fetched. I was probably too engrossed in my own brief career that ultimately took a step backwards when the Hawks brought in Mike Keenan.

I left the game with a torn ACL in my left knee and after 3 surgeries and re-hab, got right into broadcasting. I wasn't a bitter former player but I did have some very negative thoughts about Keenan and the way he coached and the fact he "sucked the life" out of me at the time. I probably brought some of that into my broadcast and had a bit of a bad attitude towards coaches when I said what I said.

I have learned a lot since then, and much of it has to do with the wonderful experiences I have had coaching in our Sabres program.

I want to share with you some thoughts I have written down in these notepads (I am a big note taker at the rink and have many drawings of practice drills and sayings from coaches in the NHL)

Coaches love sayings and quotes and live by many of them. I spent a few summers at this hockey school with many of our Sabre parents and kids. A fellow by the name of Troy Ward runs Hockey and Son's on one of the great old Prep schools, Shattuck St. Mary's in Minnesota.

He has many coaches and players in attendance and has daily seminars with the likes of L.A. Kings coach, Andy Murray and Wisconsin coach Mike Eaves, who also doubles up as the USA Under 20 Gold medal champions coach that beat Canada last year. These are men that teach the game the right way. They have passion for the sport and their attention to the smallest detail is what separates them from others. They are positive and energetic, yet demanding.

The L.A.Kings in 2002-2003 handed out this booklet as their guide to getting better every day. These are NHL players that have the ultimate goal like every other NHL team in training camp, to win the Stanley Cup.

With the Christmas break nearing and many of us are heading to tournaments for the Holidays, maybe some of these words can help motivate your team or at least guide you through some tough patches or bring you over the top to be the best group of players and coaches you can be.

Here is a slightly abbreviated version of what the NHL players get in training camp:

1. "GET BETTER EVERY DAY"

- \* Work ethic in practices, games & off ice work-outs
- \* Coachability and the ability to listen
- \* Preparation for games and practices
- \* Adherence to team guidelines for nutrition, hydration and rest

2. "STRONG PERSONAL DISCIPLINE"

- \* Early for all team & related activities
- \* Look the part
- \* In control at all times

3. "BE A STRONG TEAM PLAYER"

- \* Participate in all team and related activities
- \* Recognize and appreciate what others bring to the team
- \* Be a good listener
- \* Leadership by example
- \* Sense of family
- \* Pack mentality

4. "RESPECT THE GAME, YOUR TEAMMATES & OPPONENTS"

- \* Play hard at all times
- \* Play honest
- \* Play with composure

\* YOUNG PLAYERS...

"REMEMBER, PEOPLE HEAR MORE WHEN THEY KNOW YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING."

\* VETERANS...

"SHOW WHY YOUR STATUS AND PROFILE HAS BEEN EARNED."

\* I SEARCHED FOR GLORY...AND I DID NOT SEE  
I SEARCHED FOR VICTORY...AND VICTORY ELUDED ME  
I SEARCHED FOR TEAMWORK...AND FOUND ALL THREE.

I have spent countless hours talking hockey with ESPN's Barry Melrose and under those pinstripe suits and a load of gell in his hair, there is a very passionate hockey man.

He is a motivator as a coach, not a true X's and O's kind of coach. He brought the L.A. Kings to the Finals in 1993 with Wayne Gretzky only to lose in 5 games to the Canadiens.

He has given me a few solid quotations that he uses and they certainly can apply or be used by our coaches even at the minor hockey level.

"Average coaches want the players to think highly of him...great coaches want the players to think highly of themselves."

"It's not what you say to them, it's what they hear."

How about this one from the great Joe Paterno, who prepared as well as anyone who has ever coached any sport:

"THE WILL TO WIN IS IMPORTANT, THE WILL TO PREPARE IS VITAL."

I will continue to go through my home office and scour through the materials I have collected along the way. Maybe some of these sayings can give the coaches some ideas to keep things fresh for practice or pre game speeches to get the team ready to play. Remember to keep things positive before games. It is after games and in practices that you can get to work on things that aren't going so well.

I am sure if some of your players (all of them I hope!) read this, it can change an attitude or two that can help the team. Parents could likely do the same!

See you at the rink!

Panger