

4/30/09

The calm before the storm as the Rays get set to defend home ice this weekend against the Florida Everblades. All three games should be very exciting and I would expect at least one of the contests to go into overtime. I can't wait for the puck to drop, should be a memorable weekend.

In the North, it looks as though chili is going to beat out chicken wings, with Cincinnati holding 3-0 advantage over the Elmira Jackals. If you ever get to Elmira, try the wings at the Elbow Room.

Out West a tight series between Stockton and Las Vegas is anyone's guess and it looks like Alaska is the team to beat, holding a 3-0 lead on Victoria.

Cool Ray is outside on International Blvd right now waving to fans as they drive into the Taylor Swift Concert. Thanks Cool Ray for helping with our guerilla marketing efforts this week. I know from experience that the Cool Ray Costume is not exactly "cool". A hot sunny day today, followed by three games in three nights.... You might want to give Cool Ray a pat on the back on Sunday. Whatever happened to Little Puck anyway?

Outside of Cool Ray, Cappy Bear from the Raleigh Ice Caps is my favorite all time ECHL Mascot.

To quote Andrew Miller "See you at the rink".
All for now, Go Rays...Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

4/24/09

As the Rays get set for what should be an exciting series it doesn't appear as though either team wants to give the other any bulletin board material. In reading Andrew Miller's work and the papers in South West Florida, both teams have been cautious in what is being said to the media. To this point both groups have been complimentary of the other. One wonders if this will change. Hopefully our Rays will get off to a good start on the road this weekend.

On the business front, it is unfortunate that we will be unable to offer \$2.00 beers at our games. We felt that this was one of the best values in town and our marketing effort to promote this value helped us to improve walk up ticket sales for the first time in years. Unfortunately the decision does not fall on the Stingrays; hopefully we can come to a reasonable compromise by the time the puck drops in October.

The good news is that new season ticket sales are ahead of last year's pace and we have good reason to believe that we will be able to continue this trend throughout the

summer. Our staff is doing a great job of getting the word out that our ticket plans start for as little as \$29 a month. Our group sales team is already at work on next season (the schedule should be out very soon), which is about five months earlier than we have focused on groups in the past. Our school fundraiser program and our Corporate Support the Troops packages have been very well received and should help us re-break our group sales record.

It is very difficult to focus on next season when the team is playing so well and the games get more and more exciting, but so far the women and men in our office have been awesome.

Great quote by Coach Bednar in today's P&C:

"If the guys in our locker room can't get up for this series, then they probably need to pick another profession,"

All for now.... Go Rays! Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

4/17/08

Ten Random Thoughts:

1. The Kelly Cup is up for grabs this year. Sixteen teams still have a legitimate chance.
2. This year's Rays are very deep.
3. Having a white out is great, but when fans start telling us about the color of their undergarments, they've gone too far.
4. It would be funny if hockey coaches (like baseball managers) wore uniforms on the bench. Would Fitzzy have worn his goalie pads?
5. The Checkers/Stingrays rivalry is heating back up now that Pee Dee and Columbia are gone.
6. I think most of our fans want Florida to lose, but I think they want to see the Rays be the team to do it.
7. I miss \$2.00 Beers already.
8. I don't know where they get it, but the coffee in the locker room is very good this year.

9. Our front office is filled with very smart capable people that enjoy their work. I hope fans take the time to get to know them.

10. Is it impolite to call someone Cuz, when they are not your cousin?

Go Rays... Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

4/10/09

Congratulations to Rick Kowalsky and the other coaches receiving votes, but how did our guy not win the John Brophy award this year?! For the second straight season, Jared Bednar has coached the Rays to a 40 plus win season. This year, his winning percentage was only topped by Florida, Alaska and Idaho. 89 regular season wins in two seasons, is very impressive for any ECHL coach, yet there is much more to the position than just the numbers.

Take aside the fact that Jared works alone, Cail MacLean is a part time Assistant Coach, attending college full time. Forget about the fact that Jared is also the General Manager (one of, if not the best in the league at this post as well). Jared Bednar's South Carolina Stingrays compete every night!

The Stingrays battled through injuries and call ups this season as every team at this level must. However, with a part time goaltender called up from the SPHL and a decimated defensive core during the dog days of the season, the Rays came to work with hard hat and lunch pail, every night. Jared's teams play hard, they play disciplined and they play smart game in and game out. Those that know him, know that he is soft spoken and not a self promoter, those that coach against him know that their teams better play their best to beat his team.

Those of us that attend the games every night at the North Charleston Coliseum know what to expect every time the Rays have taken the ice this season and I guess that is just fine with us.

Congratulations Jared Bednar 2008-09 John Brophy Award Finalist!

All For Now, Go Rays, Beat Charlotte! Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

4/3/09

What a great time of year for a sports fan. Within a couple of weeks the best golfers in the world will descend on Augusta for the Masters, baseball will begin its regular season, NASCAR will race in Bristol and Martinsville, The NCAA Tournament will end, and playoff hockey begins. Is there anything better than playoff hockey? The NCAA Hockey Playoffs are unforgiving; the tournament, like basketball, comes down to single elimination lending itself to epic games and multiple overtime marathons. As exciting as the College Hockey tournament can be, professional hockey playoffs are the best.

A good playoff series creates a sense of drama and anticipation that single elimination tournaments cannot deliver. Last year the Rays played in three great series in a row, going to a fifth and deciding game against Augusta, Gwinnett and Columbia. The Rays eventually lost a seven game series 4-1 to Cincinnati, but three of the five games were decided in overtime. Throughout the course of a series there is no short of heroes and villains and as fans we get to cheer and jeer accordingly.

The rink seems different during the playoffs; the players are more focused, perhaps even quiet at times, going through their individual superstitions before the game. The fans are nervous as they know that one bounce or break could turn a series on its ear. Coaches are different, trying to appear loose, but grinding and churning on the inside. With every game the intensity grows and grows. At our level, the players are literally playing for their jobs, trying to avoid an off season furlough by advancing to another game, another series, another week, another month. Playoff hockey, I can't wait!

Good Luck Rays....Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!