

5/22/09

Well it is finally here - the Kelly Cup Championship. This is it, the Rays are playing for a National Championship! I have to admit, this is pretty exciting! As I write this, the National Media has just picked up the wager between Sarah Palin and Mark Sanford. It's pretty cool to see the South Carolina Stingrays pop up on an Associated Press story. Go ahead and Google it!

Where were you the first two times the Stingrays played for the Kelly Cup? In 1997 the Stingrays won their first Kelly Cup on the road against the Louisiana Ice Gators in front of a packed house at the Louisiana Cajun Dome. I was helping my good friend Randy Page with a live television broadcast of the action. It was my first year with the Rays and first season working in professional hockey. At the time, I thought winning a Championship was something that happened every year; boy did I have a lot to learn. As I recall there were huge crowds at places like the Sports Café to watch the final game of the series. Sound familiar?

In 2001 I was sitting with 9,000 fans at the coliseum when Kirk Daubenspeck held the mighty Trenton Titans scoreless for the final 30 minutes of hockey. I remember celebrating in the team locker room after and ruining a suit (cheap suit). We went on the road for games one and two in that series and came back with a 2-0 lead. The Titans were the Brabham Cup Champions, they were loaded. We were not supposed to win that series. Sound familiar?

Win or lose this series is going to be a blast so come on out to the Coliseum and join us! This doesn't happen every year, enjoy the ride!

Let's Go Rays! Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

5/13/09

Hockey is hot! Have you noticed it? It's the perfect storm, game seven between Ovechkin and Crosby, Boston and Chicago still battling for the Cup! The NHL has to be pleased. Hockey has to be pleased. Listen to national sports talk radio; they can't avoid it any more. Pick up the USA Today, they are writing about it. Even local talk radio here in the Low Country is talking about hockey.

How does this translate down into the minors? It's tough to tell. One thing is for sure, it can't hurt. Since the NHL lockout and the end of the NHL television agreement with ESPN, hockey has struggled with its image in our country. We know that we sell more tickets to hockey fans than we do to non hockey fans. Obviously the more hockey fans we have in our area, the more tickets we can sell in theory. Does the increased attention to the sport in recent weeks create more hockey fans? Who knows, maybe, probably, definitely? Go to a sports bar tonight, see what people are

watching. Tomorrow night, game sevens in Detroit and Boston will get attention as well.

Hockey should also thank HD TV. Those of us that attend hockey games regularly understand that hockey is much better live. Before HD, hockey was a tough sport to watch on TV to the casual fan simply because it was tough to follow the puck (who can forget the Fox "glow puck"). With HD, you can follow the puck and follow the game, even if you are just a casual fan.

Can an electric forward from Moscow Russia and a whiz kid from Cole Harbor, Nova Scotia (home of the Colts) draw hockey even with the NFL, MLB, and College Football? No chance. Can they create a ground swell that can help to grow the sport? I think so. Either way, let's enjoy the ride!

See you at Centre Pointe! Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!

5/9/09

Wow, what a finish to a great series. What a range of emotions. Midway through game five against the Everblades you had to be thinking (with the team down 3-0), "how are we going to win two in a row in Florida?" Then it all turned around. The Rays scored four unanswered goals to win game five and the rest is now history. Game six was just as crazy, watching Florida fans leaving the building with the Rays up 3-1, I was thinking, "I hope this is over". Two quick goals later, its overtime and all the momentum of the series is back with the Everblades. As the two teams shook hands (still the best tradition in all of sports) both deserved a standing ovation.

Wednesday morning broke with the sobering reality that the Rays were only half way to their true goal, the Kelly Cup. Bring on the Cyclones!

The team worked hard this season to secure home ice advantage for this series and here is where we need the help of the fans. It's time to get behind this team. We have purchased our advertising, we have sent out our Eblasts, we have enjoyed an increase in media coverage from TV, Newspapers and Radio, we have put up highway signs, sent Cool Ray out to the roadside with a pile of snow, we have offered a ticket special, our staff is averaging 100 phone calls a day, we have a weekend date.

Now, we need your help! Bring out a friend, bring your mom for Mother's Day, get a group together from your office, tell your neighbors, send out an email, put it on your Facebook site, get your boss to come, send out an inner office memo, fax, tell your family, put a sign in your yard, call a radio show, send a text, tweet, honk your horn, write a letter, bring your spouse, wear your Stingrays gear, bring your play group, bring your scout group, bring your team, bring your book club, bring your networking group,

talk to strangers, get involved, get loud, get proud.

Most of us know that playoff hockey is the best hockey; it's our job to spread the word.
With that, I thank you.

Let's go Rays... Hockey, Hockey, Hockey!