

10-31-08

Another big weekend of games on tap for the Rays, with the Florida Everblades coming to town for a pair of important South Division match-ups. After last weekend's set in Estero, you really get the feeling that this is going to be a heated rivalry this season. Here's hoping for a repeat of last Saturday's success.

I'm wondering if Florida coach Malcolm Cameron plans to use Anton Khudobin in net for both games, much like Jared Bednar is expected to do with Josh Johnson. In two of his four career contests against the Stingrays, the 2007-08 ECHL Goaltender of the Year has limited South Carolina to two or less goals; in those two other games, however, he was chased once from the net after allowing three goals, and surrendered four goals in the other.

I think it's safe to say Bobby Goepfert will get his first career AHL start this weekend for the Hershey Bears, most likely this evening in Albany, NY, against the River Rats. The 'Rats are sitting in last place in the AHL's East Division and the Bears are coming off a 6-0 thumping by the Hamilton Bulldogs Wednesday night, so it only makes sense. Plus, Goepfert's a New York native.

Speaking of the Bears, here's a story by Dan Sernoffsky on former Rays goaltender Daren Machesney that appeared earlier this week in the Lebanon Daily News: http://www.ldnews.com/sports/ci_10836096

The political ads are starting to wear as thin on me as that Sham-Wow commercial...

I caught this note in Tarik El-Bashir's blog (<http://blog.washingtonpost.com/capitalsinsider/>) from yesterday, and it reminded how cool and down to earth Washington Capitals Head Coach Bruce Boudreau is:

"A young boy, who attended practice with his mom last season, held up a sign on the outside of the KCI (Kettler Capitals Iceplex) glass reminding Boudreau that he had promised to take him to lunch. Well, Boudreau made good on that promise today, much to the delight of the boy and his mom. Boudreau just walked by the kid and his mom (and another mom and three other kids) and said, "You ready to roll? What do you guys want? And don't say steak."

Boudreau then led them out of the rink toward the elevator that leads to the mall."

Doing some player research this week, I stumbled across this six-minute video featuring new Rays defenseman Josh Godfrey from this year's Capitals rookie camp: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2008/09/22/VI2008092200906.html> It profiles the first-year pro as he's mic'ed from a rookie game against the Philadelphia Flyers, and includes soundbytes from Boudreau and Hershey Bears Head Coach Bob Woods, among others. Be sure to keep your eye out for cameos by Travis Morin, Steve Pinizzotto and Viktor Dovgan.

Former Stingrays d-man Aaron Schneekloth is tied for first among Central Hockey League blueliners with eight points this season for Colorado.

"Hockey is the only job I know where you get paid to have a nap on the day of the game." -- Chico Resch

-Joe

joe@stingrayshockey.com

10-28-08

I know I'm sounding like a broken record, but the depth in the Capitals organization is simply incredible. How often do you see an ECHL team playing with recent first (Sasha Pokulok) and second round (Josh Godfrey) draft picks? And to have guys like Michael Dubuc, Maxime Lacroix and Steve Pinizzotto down here is an added bonus. Much better having them get quality ice time with the Rays than playing once every four or five games in Chocolatetown.

One footnote lost in last Saturday's 4-1 win over Florida was the absence of defenseman Scott Romfo, who sat out in favor of Godfrey, the newly-assigned rookie blueliner. Up until that point Romfo had skated in 94 consecutive games for the Rays, including all 92 regular season and playoff contests last season.

Curiosity got the best of me after Dubuc's 11-shot performance in Saturday's game. After checking the ECHL Official Guide and Record Book, I found that Bob Woods holds the league record with 17 shots on goal in one game. That would be the same Bob Woods who is currently the head coach of the Hershey Bears.

In case you missed them in the SportsCenter highlights last week, here are two perfect examples of clean, open-ice hits, courtesy of Tyler Sloan and Doug Weight:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOo1mTad0Jc> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhepQWlvQKs>

I've been hearing some great reviews on Dave Hanson's new book, *"Slap Shot Original: The Man, the Foil and the Legend."* For those not familiar, Dave was part of the famous "Hanson Brothers" from the movie *Slap Shot*. I had the chance to interview him a few years back, and he had some hilarious stories to tell

not only from the Slap Shot film set, but also from his professional playing career. I'm sure those, as well as a number of other tales, are retold in paperback.

For those interested, here's a link to it on Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/Slap-Shot-Original-Foil-Legend/dp/1600781152>

The New York Islanders on Monday unveiled their new third jerseys for this season (<http://islanders.nhl.com/team/app/?service=page&page=NewsPage&articleid=388905>), which is a throwback to their sweaters from the 1970's. Thankfully it wasn't a reincarnation of this gem: http://ak.buy.com/db_assets/large_images/562/202087562.jpg

Anyone else craving an Orange Julius?

Lastly, birthday wishes go out to Stingrays Ticket Executive Mike Bellis. Happy 3-0, Bellis!

"All hockey players are bilingual. They know English and profanity." – Gordie Howe

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to drop me a line at: joe@stingrayshockey.com

-Joe

10-24-08

I can understand the concern among fans, with Bobby Goepfert up in Hershey and no suitable back-up here in SC. Let's not forget, though, that Josh Johnson was put to the test early last season when Davis Parley missed nearly a month after having his appendix removed. And then, when Parley was recalled to Hershey in late-December for a two-week stretch, Johnson was put to the test again. The Stingrays were 8-5-1 in those games Parley was lost to injury and recall, and the rookie Johnson proved he was no slouch, playing back-to-back nights on three occasions as well as three straight contests from Dec. 29-31. He and Parley both finished the campaign with 20 wins, the only time two Rays goalies have pulled off the feat in the same season. I think Johnson is more than up to this challenge.

Sean McMorrow is certainly racking up the frequent flyer miles. The erstwhile enforcer, who participated in the Edmonton Oilers and Springfield Falcons training camps before signing last week with the Charlotte Checkers, yesterday inked a deal with the AHL's Rockford IceHogs. He's the second cement mixer from the South Division to move up this week, with the Florida Everblades' Riley Emmerson getting loaned to the Rochester Americans on Tuesday.

I'm looking forward to this weekend's games against Florida. Head Coach Malcolm Cameron brought close to 10 players with him from the now-defunct Texas Wildcatters, leaving only two players from last season's Everblades team (Ernie Hartlieb and Brad Herauf). The recent addition of 2007-08 ECHL Goaltender of the Year Anton Khudobin only makes them stronger, but the team has also seen Jacob Micflikier, former ECHL All-Star Ryan Lang, and the previously mentioned Emmerson lost to AHL recalls. Lang, however, should be in the lineup tonight and tomorrow since he was returned yesterday from the AHL's Houston Aeros.

I noted in a prior press release that Brad Farynuk was appointed the 6th captain in team history, but technically there have been at least eight players who have sported the "C": Tim Harris, Gary Socha, Brett Marietti, Jared Bednar, Trevor Johnson, Mike Jickling, Cail MacLean and Farynuk. Did I miss anyone?

Anyone else been loving the cool weather we've had over the last week? It actually does feel like hockey season!

As I was perusing the racks of a local bookstore last night, I stumbled across a special issue of The Hockey News titled "Greatest Masks of All Time." I've always appreciated the uniqueness of many players' masks and the imagination of the artists who create them. Maybe it's the Friday the 13th factor and Jason Voorhies, but the scarier the mask the better. And for my money, the scariest of them all might be Gary Bromley's mask from the Vancouver Canucks in 1980. Take a look and see if you agree: <http://members.aol.com/bobvitt/BromleyHeadA1.jpg>

"How would you like a job where, every time you make a mistake, a big red light goes on and 18,000 people boo?" -- Jacques Plante

-Joe

10-21-08

If you're reading this, you either happened here by chance or you clicked on the unfamiliar button on the main page of the Stingrays website. Hopefully it's the latter, but regardless all are welcome. Barbs & Blurbs is the newest addition to the Rays site; a blog that can be best described as a mish-mash of hockey news, notes and everything in between.

Some of you may be thinking, "Geez, another blog?" But I say why not. The Washington Capitals have embraced the blogosphere more than most – if not all – NHL teams, as evidenced by owner Ted Leonsis' "Ted's Take," (<http://www.tedstake.com/>) and Capitals Senior Writer Mike Vogel's blog, Dump 'N Chase (<http://boards.washingtoncaps.com/index.php?autocom=blog&blogid=59>), which offers some great

reads. Not to be forgotten is beat writer Tarik El-Bashir (<http://blog.washingtonpost.com/capitalsinsider/>), who provides extensive coverage and frequent updates on the Caps for the Washington Post.

The Hershey Bears in recent years also have branched out to the online community, with play-by-play broadcaster John Walton (<http://johnwaltonhockey.blogspot.com/>) and Patriot News beat writer Tim Leone (http://blog.pennlive.com/patriotnewssports/hershey_bears/) contributing their respective blogs. And earlier this year longtime Stingrays reporter Andrew Miller introduced his "Rays The Roof" blog (<http://www.charleston.net/blogs/stingrays/>) to readers on the Post & Courier's website. In this information age, where news is delivered quicker than you can say Jack Robinson, I say the more the merrier.

I don't want to sound like I'm passing out the Kool-Aid, but this is really an exciting time to be a fan of each team in our affiliation chain. The Stingrays are coming off a team-record 47 wins and an appearance in the American Conference Finals; Hershey, arguably one of the deepest teams in the AHL this year, started the 2008-09 campaign 5-0; and the Capitals, behind Hart Trophy winner Alexander Ovechkin, Jack Adams Award winner Bruce Boudreau, and a number of up-and-coming young stars, have brought a level of excitement back to the nation's capital that has been missing for most of the last decade.

Do you think Michal Neuvirth was anxious to get between the pipes Saturday night? After going 3 weeks between starts in goal, the rookie netminder took off for his crease following God Bless America. Only problem was that the Star Spangled Banner had yet to be performed.

In other goalie news, Washington inked goaltender Braden Holtby to a three-year entry level contract yesterday. Don't expect the 2008 4th round pick in Chocolatetown or North Charleston anytime soon, however, as the 19-year-old isn't eligible. Maybe we'll see the Western Hockey League product donning a Stingrays jersey next spring, though.

It seems a little strange looking at the standing and seeing only six teams in the South Division, doesn't it?

A number of fans have wondered if Matt Scherer will be back for another season of "Scherer's Shots." I can confirm Season 2 is in production, with the season premiere due later this afternoon.

In case you missed it, here's former Stingrays defenseman Grant McNeill grappling with noted minor league enforcer Jon "Nasty" Mirasty from this past weekend's Bears-Syracuse Crunch game in Hershey: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywCu6nZihgU>

For the game worn jersey collectors out there, the Philadelphia Flyers' sweaters from their last game at the Spectrum are currently up for bid. Here's the link to the auction for former Stingrays goalie Martin Biron's game: <http://auction.nhl.com/cgi-bin/ncommerce3/ProductDisplay?prfnbr=98929501&prmenbr=12717464&aunbr=99276211>

Before I forget, I wanted to thank Ashley Hoffman, Darren Abbott and the rest of the Stingrays organization for their work and support in this endeavor. Further kudos go out to former Stingrays backup goaltender Marc "Dudz" Dudzinski for his help in designing the Barbs & Blurbs graphic. Dudz does some fantastic work, and those interested in his services can contact him at dudz@vt.edu.

Finally, I thought I'd conclude my initial entry with one of my favorite hockey quotes, courtesy of former Pittsburgh Penguins and University of Wisconsin Head Coach Bob Johnson: "It's a great day for hockey."

-Joe