

Block Party

Headline

"[Dan Carcillo]s played his role absolutely perfectly up till now." – Pat Foley, Thursday night during the 1st period of the Blackhawks-Flyers broadcast.

Eddie Olczyk: "I know Carcillo's been suspended a couple of times, Pat. But the one thing he has done... He's chipped in offensively, playing with the big guys. He's chipped in, in his role. But, his presence, I think, has done more for this team than maybe everything else I just talked about. Guys on that bench get a little bigger when you got Daniel Carcillo sitting next to you. You don't want to see him suspended. I think he's done his job for the most part. You've got to play with a little more control, but his presence has been very important to this team this year."

Pat Foley: "I don't think anybody could question that."

Allow me, Pat.

When tonight's column was originally lined up, I figured this would be an appropriate time and space for a Blackhawks midseason analysis. You know, being tonight is game 42 in all. Then along came the first period Thursday night and another mid-action homily delivered by Blackhawk sycophants, Pat Foley and Eddie Olczyk.

As rendered above, Foley and Olczyk for some reason felt the need to interrupt their call of a game between two of the top teams in all the NHL to support a player who deliberately tried to injure another and was rightfully suspended 7 games for his inexcusable actions.

While Olczyk and Foley did not try to defend Carcillo for the Gilbert hit in particular, they took it upon themselves to prop the controversial hit man up for tribute. They claimed the "sandpaper" Carcillo brings to the team is a "huge reason the Hawks are where they are now."

Interesting. I would think something more along the lines of three Hawks currently on pace to have or flirt with 40-goal seasons is to be considered "huge."

When Dan Carcillo launched himself into Tom Gilbert last Monday night at the United Center, Carcillo held no intention of playing the puck. He never even looked at it.

In fact, Carcillo could have beat Gilbert to the dump-in behind the Oilers goal had he not pulled up. Carcillo pulled up because he didn't want to get hit. Instead, he quit pursuit of his dump in, slowed up and set Gilbert up for attack. You don't need to be a mind reader to understand what Carcillo's intention was on that play.

Coincidentally, immediately when the hit happened, Pat Foley condemned Carcillo for his actions, saying "Dan Carcillo is going to have a meeting with Brendan Shanahan (the NHL's director of discipline)."

Hey Pat, is part of Carcillo's role to consistently get suspended or put his team down a man for five minutes? I bet the Hawks bench felt so much safer on Nov. 29 when Carcillo was trying to bully 5-10 Daymond Langkow (171 PIMS total since 2004) into a fight during the third period of an embarrassing home loss to the Coyotes.

How about that Carcillo, who makes everyone of those teammates of his "a little bigger" as Edzo put it? When exactly did Carcillo choose to pull this stunt on Gilbert? Why, it was while he was on the ice with Jamal Mayers and John Scott, that's when.

Ironically, had Carcillo himself not busted his own knee as consequence of the hit, he had two Edmonton players circling him with eyes of vengeance as Gilbert lay injured. It was Carcillo who needed Mayers to come to his rescue there.

The Gilbert hit wasn't the first time in Monday's game Carcillo made a choice that could have seriously injured an opponent.

After serving an early first period minor penalty, the penalty box door was opened for Carcillo as his time expired. With the Oilers rushing the puck up the penalty box side of the ice into the neutral zone, Carcillo hesitated before stepping out of the box. His clear intention was to catch the Oiler player unaware and unprepared for a collision with him as he was tardy stepping out of the box. It was a dangerous decision and could have had an ugly result. Thankfully, Carcillo's plan failed. Carcillo's clowning, however, was so obvious that even Steve Konroyd had to acknowledge it on the commentary.

He had tried the same thing in Minnesota back on December 14th. There, Carcillo stalled coming onto the ice during a line change as Wild forward Colton Gillies carried a puck near the player's benches. Carcillo sat on the dasher for a full two seconds (the player he was coming on for already off the ice), and then tried to jump out in front of Gillies as the Wild player got to the red line. Luckily, Gillies was either alerted by a teammate or saw him at the last second and side-stepped Carcillo's leg. At that end of that shift, Carcillo had every member of the Wild jawing at him for that reckless move and was challenged by Brad Staubitz to fight.

Here are three instances, over the course of twenty days, of Dan Carcillo deliberately trying to wreck, or blindsides, an unseeing opponent.

Its obvious Carcillo has zero respect for the game, and even less for the well-being of his opponents. Exactly how is that supposed to protect Patrick Kane or make Duncan Keith "feel bigger?" In fact, Carcillo is the antithesis of what Foley and Olczyk proclaim him to be.

If anything, Carcillo's recent actions (which are hardly anything new) put an even bigger target on his fellow Blackhawks. If Carcillo takes out a top four d-man on the Oilers, who do you think the Oilers are hunting down next? It won't be Carcillo. His stupid ass will be in

Brendan Shanahan's office.

The honeymoon is over. Carcillo hasn't changed. He's a liability, just the same as he was in Philly. Just the same as when Hawks fans and media chuckled when the Flyers inserted him into Game 2 of the Finals.

Joel Quenneville usually doesn't give the media much, but in talking about Carcillo this past week he said Carcillo has to walk a "fine line" in the future and "we need to be aware of that as well."

So there you have it. Carcillo's on-ice presence is a distraction to the team.

He's a cheap-shot artist who isn't good enough to play an honest game. He's not tough or courageous enough to play it straight.

With any luck, Carcillo's knee is in store for extensive repair. In that event, the Blackhawks gain by losing. Stan Bowman becomes a better GM. Joel Quenneville becomes a better coach. The penalty kill gets a lighter load. And the rest of the Blackhawks need not worry about what one senseless individual might do next to undermine the success of the team.

Half-season stuff

It's really remarkable in a sense how Nick Leddy has slid right into Brian Campbell's place on the second pairing.

Through 41 games, Leddy is averaging 22:47 of ice time, has 2 goals and 17 assists.

Last year in his first 41 games, Brian Campbell averaged 23:14 of ice time, scored 2 goals and picked up 16 assists.

The similarities don't end there. In the same comparison, Campbell averaged 2:07 of power play time per game. This season, Leddy is averaging 2:01.

On the penalty kill units, Campbell and Leddy have matching 1:48 per game averages.

Since Campbell missed the initial 13 games of the 2010-11 season with a knee injury, his first 41 games ran from November 1 to February 9, 2011. Over that time, the Blackhawks record was 21-17-1-2.

Campbell's plus/minus rating was a +23.

Nick Leddy is currently -6. Right now Niklas Hjalmarsson is a plus-2. Over those 41 games last season with Campbell, Hjalmarsson was a plus-13.

There's still more than seven weeks until the NHL trade deadline, but the Blackhawks primary need is clear. A top-four defenseman should be Stan Bowman's utmost priority.

Duncan Keith's minutes are down ever so slightly from last year. At this point in last season Keith was averaging 26:42 per game. Right now he's at 26:28. Keith has cut his average shift-length down by five seconds so he's actually taking a few more per game as compared to last.

So, for all the talk of this year's "depth" there has been no change in Keith's workload. Not helping, are some of Quenneville's mind-numbing choices, like dressing John Scott on the back-end of a back-to-back and then skating him four shifts and not at all over that last 35 minutes.

Then there's the dysfunctional Blackhawks family. Quenneville said after Friday night's game he was "trying to work Dylan Olsen in more" only to have Olsen returned to Rockford yesterday after 15 solid minutes against the Avs. He's left with a player without a position (Scott), a 40-year old dman who can't play two nights in a row (O'Donnell) and another (Lepisto) he seemingly doesn't like. So much for depth.

Plain and simple, up until this week, the Hawks struggles have been limited to stretches when either Brent Seabrook or Duncan Keith has been out with injury. They've given up the fourth-most goals in the West and the other three teams are not in the playoff picture.

Leddy and Hjalmarsson as a pair have been a disaster for weeks. They're beat low consistently and Leddy gets lost too often. Without 2 or 7, the defense suffers worse than in years past.

The one to aim for is Anaheim's Francois Beauchemin, but he's on every top contender's wish list. Bob Murray will get a lot of offers. One thing the Ducks have been good at this year has been the PK and Beauchemin is the anchor of that unit. He also skates 26 minutes a night, is 31 and has won a Cup before.

And I'm sure he can better ways to help his team than beating up little Daymond Langkow.

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