

Block Party

Digging His Own Grave?

When this off season began in early May (a major, now annual problem two years running) it did so with a relative bang. What looked like the precursor to an eventful summer has remained the biggest story.

Mike Haviland was relieved of his assistant coaching duties on May 8th by Joel Quenneville under high scrutiny from nearly everyone observing. Quenneville explained his decision noting he did so after his boss, Stan Bowman, in season review discussions, expressed his concern that there was "dysfunction" on the coaching staff.

Quenneville responded by firing the guy many believed to be the Blackhawks next head coach in waiting. Haviland went on to be a finalist for the Washington Capitals head coaching job. That process, though, dragged out so long that when Adam Oates was chosen over Haviland, the 2007 AHL coach of the year missed out on most of the open AHL head coaching positions and still remains unemployed as of today.

Haviland had been an assistant on the Hawks' bench for the past four seasons. He was promoted from Rockford prior to the 2008-09 campaign, when Denis Savard was still head coach. John Torchetti was the other assistant at the time (coming on the season prior). Torchetti left shortly after the Blackhawks hoisted the Cup in 2010 to take the same job (with a spruced up "associate coach" tag) with the then Atlanta Thrashers.

Torchetti's exit paved the way for Quenneville to hire his guy, Mike Kitchen. In two seasons, Kitchen's work has been inundated with criticism. Some of it has probably been fair to a degree give the overall team disappointment since his arrival, but its impossible for anyone without first hand knowledge of the responsibilities and performances of the assistant coach's to accurately grade his work.

In the championship 2009-10 season, and the following, Mike Haviland was seen as something of a fix-it guy for Joel Quenneville. In particular, whenever one of the special teams units would slump, Haviland was thrown at the task. How much of this could be attributed to Haviland individually is hard to say, but usually the units would improve on his direct watch.

But for some reason this past season Quenneville cut the legs out from under Haviland. Now maybe Haviland had a bad year. Players can have bad seasons. So too can coaches. Or, perhaps Quenneville felt Haviland was gaining too much momentum in terms of general perception, or share of the credit. Either way, Quenneville stuck by his hire all season and through the fallout leading to Haviland's exit.

This week Quenneville announced Haviland's replacement in Jamie Kompon.

At least at the onset many speculated a major name to fill the vacant assistant's job, or a rising young name from the AHL, a lot like the Haviland promotion in 2008. But since Quenneville had just dismissed his biggest on the payroll threat to his position, it would be hard to believe he'd replace Haviland with another in vogue head coach prospect.

The other issue, as we witnessed in the Blackhawks pursuit of free agents like Zach Parise and Ryan Suter, is that the rest of the league is fully aware of the internal turmoil plaguing the relationship between hockey ops and Joel Quenneville's coaching staff.

For the moment anyway, Chicago isn't all roses.

Kompon is another friendly face for Coach Q. And from all indications he can use some around the United Center.

Quenneville is entering the second-to-last year of his contract.

Contract or not, I do believe 2012-13 will be Joel Quenneville's last season behind the Blackhawks' bench.

The last year (2013-14) of his deal is the first year of Stan Bowman's three year contract extension. As of the moment, Scotty Bowman still owns John McDonough's ear so Stan isn't going anywhere. Unless Quenneville coaches the Hawks to his second Stanley Cup next spring he won't have much leverage for an extension heading into a lame duck contract season. If that's the case, expect some sort of mutual parting of the ways.

That's if Quenneville survives this season, which he may not.

Of course until then Quenneville will have to make due with the roster Stan Bowman gives him.

Whether or not Stan and Joel have been on the same page in the past, the general manager did make one move this summer that Joel should be happy with.

Defenseman Sheldon Brookbank is a decent sized, lumbering, middle hockey-aged defenseman who can block a shot and throw his weight around effectively mostly for ten to twelve minutes a night.

Brookbank is essentially the long-awaited replacement for Matt Walker. His game is nearly identical to Walker's. Only Brookbank is 1/100th of a step quicker.

Q will like him. Chances are you won't. Granted, for those with accurate memories, fans were warm to Walker at first too. But, after a steady dose of Walker skating next to the likes of Brian Campbell it was easy to be underwhelmed with the former big number eight. Walker was unfairly criticized at times. Quenneville certainly overextended Walker, which led to Walker's limitations being exposed and eventually tired out all together. That was Q's fault. And also a byproduct of the depth chart at the time.

Unless one of the other defenseman on the roster is shipped out, Quenneville shouldn't have the same problem with Brookbank. With Johnny Oduya, Nick Leddy and Niklas Hjalmarsson and a healthy Steve Montador ahead of him on the depth chart, Brookbank is a 6th defenseman at best.

The reality is Brookbank is only keeping a roster spot warm until Dylan Olsen or Joe Lavin are ready.

--I understand most of the backlash stemming from the owner's first CBA amendment proposal to the NHLPA.

For the league to continuously boast of record revenues year after year since the 2004-05 lockout to then come forth asking to cut the player's share of revenue from the current 57 percent to 46 percent is absurd.

As well, player's should not even consider entry-level contracts being extended from the current three, to five years. Think of how much money the Blackhawks and Lightning made off Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane and Steven Stamkos individually during their

first three seasons in the National Hockey League. Those three players were tremendously under-compensated to their value and in the amount of revenue they were directly responsible for bringing in during their three-year entry level contracts. That's money those players will never see a share of. Kane and Toews are still a steal for the Blackhawks at six million per season. Extending pre-structured entry-levels another two years is essentially stealing money from the pockets of the young superstar players many franchises build and bank around.

However, one aspect of the owner's proposal can't really be argued.

Rollbacks are inevitable.

According to reports, since 2005 the league's revenues are up 50 percent.

However, since 2005-06 the salary cap has risen 80%.

The single-most contributing factor to this discrepancy has been the NHLPA taking advantage of its option to inflate the upper limit on the cap each season by 5 percent.

The harsh reality is the player's will have to bite at least one bullet in these negotiations and this should be the one.

Even though it's not a problem the players necessarily created (the owner's gave them the right with the escalator clause in the current CBA) alone – they simply took fair advantage of an option in the CBA that was available to them, it has thrown the salary structure out of alignment and it will have to be corrected.



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