

Cherry, players throw goodbye party

Steve Marantz

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By Steve Marantz
Globe Staff

NORTH ANDOVER — The big Gambrel Cape with the backyard swimming pool and tennis court was open, in much the personal manner of its owner, to those who came expecting a wake. Next to his players, the house will be the thing Don Cherry hurts most to lose.

For yesterday, the Bruins released Cherry as coach, at his request.

He stood on the porch, ludicrously garbed in a striped T-shirt hanging to his knees, the kind high school girls wear to pajama parties, rotundly eccentric, and tenderly patted his house.

"I did a lot of the work myself," said Don

Cherry, carpenter and unemployed hockey coach. "Everything is real tasteful. I modeled it after an old English house."

Rose Cherry greeted the visitors, offered food and drink and kind words. Brad Park was sipping beer in the paneled living room with reporters. Neighbors came bearing food. Blue, the dog, stuck her nose in some fried clams.

"Are those the neighbors whose cat You-Know-Who devoured?" someone asked.

"No, those people live on the other side of us," said Rose Cherry. You-Know-Who didn't appreciate being the butt of a joke. She glowered at the reporters.

When Cherry sat down, he sat down hard.

His body settled into the couch, a tire gone flat. A nomadic life in hockey had made the house, and the security with the Bruins, more than appreciated. This was his life, and his family's life, and now it was past tense, and for Don Cherry it was all finally sinking in.

"I think it will really hit me tomorrow," said Cherry.

"Will you regret it?"

"I don't know," said Cherry. "Maybe. When Rose proposed to me I woke up the next morning and said 'Jesus Christ, What have I done?'"

Laughter. Pause.

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Don Cherry and Blue relax in North Andover home. (Globe photo by Bill Ryerson)

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"Sure," he said softly. "First place club. One of the glamor teams. Sure."

The events of the day hung in the air as would stale cigar smoke, blurring the eyes, choking the throat. The morning meeting, the final expected dreaded chasm, the public announcements, the explanations, the recriminations. They settled on Cherry, a fleshy subdued pillow swallowed up by a couch, and weighed down his natural exuberance.

Intermittently, he spoke of the day, in bits and pieces, drawing out incomplete thoughts, cutting through the mist of sudden change.

"You know, I keep skirting around this whole thing," said Cherry. "The real heart of this is that I just can't stand criticism of my players. By the general manager, by the media, by anybody."

To the end, Cherry was the players' coach, the type who would shield his players from everything and anybody except himself. He recalled contemptuously those occasions when others within the Bruins' organization would try to influence his control. But true to his hero, Lord Admiral Nelson and true to the nautical curios in the living room, Cherry had to be captain of his hockey ship.

"You know what happened?" he said. "It was my little ship, right Brad? And I wouldn't let anyone else on board."

"Was Harry jealous of your popularity?" he was asked. "I'm not going to get into any of that," answered Cherry. "Why say stuff now. It doesn't do me any good. At first I thought it was that but I'm not sure . . ."

"It's a strange thing. I'm getting along with Harry better now than at any time at the beginning or at the end."

There had been a chance, the slightest wedge of a

Cherry's NHL coaching record

Year	Team	Regular Season				Pts.	Playoffs			Finished
		G	W	L	T		G	W	L	
1974-75	Boston	80	40	28	14	94	3	1	2	2d, lost in prelim. rd.
1975-76	Boston	80	48	15	17	113	12	5	7	1st, lost in semifinal
1976-77	Boston	80	49	23	8	106	14	8	6	1st, lost in finals
1977-78	Boston	80	51	18	11	113	15	10	5	1st, lost in finals
1978-79	Boston	80	43	23	14	100	11	7	4	1st, lost in semifinals
Totals		400	231	105	64	526	55	31	24	

possibility, that the differences could be worked out. The meeting with Harry Sinden and Paul Mooney had begun gingerly, almost reluctantly. What had to be said wasn't easy for either of the three. They talked about Mooney's home in Ft. Erie and about snakes and about anything. Except the Bruins.

"Nobody wanted to bring it up," said Cherry. "We could have still been there."

And then Mooney spoke. And soon enough the verdict was in. Cherry couldn't agree to change his personality at the blustery age of 45. His decisiveness might be his most enduring quality. Cherry either likes or dislikes, with no compromising, and in this case, he disliked to the core of his soul. Not necessarily one person or two persons, but a compromise.

"They said they'd work out the money," said Cherry. "Easy to say afterward, isn't it? But that wouldn't have made any difference."

"The hardest thing was that they were so friendly when I went to the meeting. Everyone was so friendly."

And why not? By his own admission Cherry is a difficult man to live with. His five-year marriage with the Bruins was too passionate to continue burning.

"Rose's theory is that I was through three months ago," said Cherry. "I went up to the office to get my Hockey News and my subscription was canceled. I should have known."

"I picked them up today. They were all Harry's."