

Eddie Is Still Beating the Hockey Bushes

By Steve Marantz
A Member of the Sports Staff

Hoarse and gruff was the voice on the telephone from Collingwood, Ontario, but the words were, as ever, warm.

"How is everything in old Kay Cee?" asked Eddie Bush, the man who made people laugh in the worst of times last winter when he coached the pitiful Scouts.

"The leaves are down here," reported Eddie. "We've had one snowfall."

Winter was fierce and angry last January when Bush came to Kansas City to replace the tempestuous Bep Guidolin. At 57, he was virtually unknown outside Canadian junior hockey circles, but the Broderick Crawford look-alike brought with him a tall reputation for being mean.

It wasn't too long before the man became separated from the myth. Bush was only mean-sounding, a result of polyps in his throat. Eventually, minor surgery improved his throat. Unfortunately, modern medicine couldn't help the Scouts.

"Kansas City was a nice place," said Bush. "Too bad it all ended the way it did."

When Bush took over as the Scouts' coach he promised no miracles. He didn't expect anything but a good effort from his players and he didn't expect anything at all from the front office. Basically, his job was to help bail out a sinking ship.

"What we needed was four or five players," said Bush. "I said that many, many times. Some of ours were short of ability."

As the days went by, the Scouts were losing more regularly than ever. When a 16-game winless streak ended, a bigger and better 27-game streak started in its place. To keep his balance, Bush retreated into a shell of folksy bromides and homespun philosophy.

He had the answers: What about a trade, Eddie? "Anyone will trade you a pork chop for a pig," he would say. No offense, Eddie? "Can't put the biscuit in the basket," he would say.

And when the last game was done, he said: "Well, not everyone can finish in first place."

When the season was over, it was really over for Eddie Bush. His first coaching job in the National Hockey

League was undoubtedly his last. He was an interim coach in Kansas City. The Colorado Rockies sought a younger, more conventional coach to make a fresh start.

"Everything was talk of going broke," said Bush. "Too bad it blew up like it did. You have a nice building there, but you gotta have hockey men running it."

Bush made his last big-time fling in April on a tour of Japan with the Scouts before returning to his wife in Collingwood. Over the summer there were no surprise phone calls, such as the one he received last January from

Baz Bastien, the Scouts' assistant general manager. Bush, thinking maybe he was tired after 35 years in hockey, didn't ask for the post in Kansas City. His old part-time job selling cars was still there.

"I made up my mind to come back here and ease out," said Bush.

Happily, the book is still open on Eddie Bush. At some point between the fading memory of the Scouts and the coming of the first snowfall in Collingwood, Bush heard the voice from within.

"Eddie, you old hockey puck, don't quit," it said.

So he took over the Junior-B team Collingwood.

The voice on the phone growled as he spoke of his decision.

"Well, now, it was the home team said Eddie. "Gives you a little eh?"

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