

During the last several months, I have become a Carolina Hurricanes hockey fan.

One could say that has been easy to do, since it was the playoff season. One could also say it was easy to do, since they are the only professional sport in the RTP area, Phil is into sports, everyone here has been talking about them, etc., etc., etc. There are many reasons I could give for my "fanness", all of which are valid.

For the first time ever, I noticed that I would plan things around watching the games, just as much as I plan things around dinners with my family or other special events. I also noticed that I started to learn about what the terms meant, who the players were, the difference between offense and defense (which, in a game the speed of hockey was difficult for me to discern!), and I even listened to satellite radio hockey talk on the "home ice" station. I have simply never done any of this before, certainly not this way!

The intensity of the game is compelling, yes; but, what I can see draws me to it is what it appears to take to be great in the game. Here is some of what I see now that I have learned through this season leading to the Stanley Cup win on June 19:

- The players are agile, athletic and skilled in what they do...of course. That doesn't happen because they were all born that way; they have spent countless hours on frozen ponds and lakes in their neighborhoods, local ice rinks, and anywhere they could skate. They care about their profession, and do what it takes to be part of it. It becomes their life.
- These players are not afraid of all that it takes to be champions. They were all injured, bruised and battered...but that didn't stop them. This is a team that was built to win the Stanley Cup - but started the season at the bottom of the predictions to win it. That didn't stop them...the Stanley Cup was the future they were living into.
- It appeared that the Hurricanes were destined to win the Cup in the fourth game of the series against Edmonton. Edmonton made a heroic comeback, winning two games...they outplayed Carolina in games 5-6, tying the series. Many people said that Carolina had lost its steam, its will, and had an uphill battle in front of them to win game 7. The Hurricanes came into game 7 with all of the moxie they had shown before...and with even more than they had ever brought. It wasn't over for them, they gave it their best game, and they won. It simply isn't over until someone says it is...circumstances don't dictate anything.
- Peter Laviolette, the coach, wore a wristband through the season that said "Relentless". This band represented a way for him to raise money for childhood leukemia...and was precipitated by his neighbor, young Julia, who has leukemia. She relapsed during the season, he bought a bottle of wine called Relentless for her parents, and bought a case to give a bottle per game to the player who was

Relentless. At all of the press conferences after the games, he told the media who won it, and what he was doing. Through this process he raised a lot of money for leukemia research. Hockey and leukemia research aren't tied together...Peter tied them together and made a difference in the world. All of us can do that, in some way.

- Rod Brind'Amor, the team captain, is in his 30's and at the top of this game. He just signed a 5 year contract with the Hurricanes; he wants to end his career with the team. The general manager said that he is the best all round player he has ever seen, he has the team's respect because he earned it, and may well be able to play beyond the 5 years because of the way he takes care of himself. Any of us can be at the top of our game anytime, earn the respect of others, and take care of ourselves...we owe that to the world.
- Cam Ward, the 22 year old goalie, came into his own during the playoffs...his calm, deliberate play in this critical position is one of the main reasons Carolina won the Cup. He is an ordinary guy, about to get married and start his adult life, with a passion for what he does...the passion for his part in the game showed.
- The fans in Edmonton and the fans in Raleigh sang both National Anthems during the playoffs. It was clear that respect was present for both nations by the fans...no one had to do that.
- The fans at game 7 in the RBC arena stood the entire game. There is no question that the fans "Listened For" the Hurricanes, and it made a big difference to the team.

I could go on and on with this...with pleasure. Let me end by saying that I am inspired by what is possible when a community/group/individual gets behind something, focuses on it single-mindedly, and makes it happen. Thank you, Carolina Hurricanes. I look forward to next season!