

TALKING WITH EX-KING ANSON CARTER

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 22, 2013

Last week, I had the pleasure of talking with former NHLer Anson Carter who is currently in his hometown of Toronto filming Season 4 of CBC's *Battle of the Blades*. While we did discuss his time on *Battle*, Carter also enlightened me on his experiences in Los Angeles as a player, an analyst and as a resident in addition to more delicate matters such as race in hockey, especially stemming from unfortunate events involving Joel Ward and former King Wayne Simmonds.

This past Sunday's installment of *Battle of the Blades* had Anson and his partner, three-time Canadian pairs Olympian Shae-Lynn Bourne, narrowly miss elimination as the pair danced to Bryan Adams's 1984 hit – and a personal favourite of mine – “Run to You”. Nevertheless, Carter has been enjoying a wonderful few weeks on the show.

“*Battle of the Blades* is fun, it's a lot of work. I keep telling people that all the time,” Carter told me. “We spend a lot of time off the ice going through steps. We spend a lot of time on the ice to make sure our body positions, our posture and our tempo is exact and perfect to the music. So, we want to make sure that we put enough work during the week so that by the time the weekend comes, we're just having fun with it skating the program, letting the program breathe.”

A major challenge for the male participants this season, like any season, has been trying to adapt to a smoother ice surface, different type of skates and, of course, with someone who has been figure skating for years in the most cutthroat of competitions.

“It's always a challenge when you're working someone with a different industry, an elite person,” Carter elaborated. “I put a lot of pressure on myself and a lot of us guys do because we have a lot of pride as individuals and we've got big egos as athletes too; and that's what drives us to the top. So, we want to make sure we don't let ourselves down but more importantly, we don't want to let our partners down – so we want to push ourselves every day to try to improve.”

Be sure to tune in to CBC next Sunday (8pm EST or check your local listings) to see *Battle of the Blades*. For those of you who do not get CBC, you can watch *Battle* online at www.cbc.ca/battle. You can also vote for your favourite pair on the website as well.

Last season, Anson Carter was an analyst for FoxSports West during Los Angeles Kings games. There, he worked with, among others, Kings' Hall-of-Fame broadcaster Bob Miller. I asked Carter what it was like

working with the long-time play-by-play man, Miller's long-time color analyst Jim Fox as well as FS-West host Patrick O'Neal.

"Those guys are pros," Carter said. "Bob is a tremendous storyteller. He does a great job in keeping the fans involved. Foxy's a great analyst. Patty O'Neal, he's a great host, keeps things loose, keeps things comfortable on set. So, it was a tremendous experience for me to work with those guys."

In keeping with his time at FS-West, Carter went on to tell me about what he learns from each of his vocational experiences:

"I always try to take a little from everyone I work with. When you're playing, you watch guys play, you watch them prepare and you see how they go about their craft. It's no different with Foxy and Bob, Patrick and the guys there in LA. I just try to watch them and try to learn just from watching as much as possible and try to add that to my repertoire and make sure I'm prepared every single show."

Speaking of the Kings, I couldn't resist but ask Carter what his thoughts on this season's version of the team are.

"The Kings are in a good position this year," he told me. "They had a tough season last year because they were coming off a Stanley Cup and you have that high and then you have the stoppage in play with the lockout and it's only a half-season. You had Quickie coming off back surgery and he got off to a slow start.

"Certainly the Kings are going to be much-improved this season because they had that longer break. They didn't have that Stanley Cup run even though they went quite deep in the playoffs (in 2012), they didn't have that run so that gave a chance for their guys to heal physically and more importantly gave the guys a mental break as well.

"You have those top teams (most notably Chicago and San Jose) there every single year. I like the Kings' chances and like every team in the league, health is a big issue but as long as they're healthy and as long as they have Jonathan Quick in net and he's healthy, then he gives them a chance to win every single game."

While he did only play 15 games in a Kings uniform, Carter's connection to Los Angeles goes beyond his time on the ice.

"I've always liked the atmosphere there (in Los Angeles). That's one of the reasons I moved to California back in '96-97," Carter started off. "My first year pro, I lived in Santa Monica in the off-season and then I lived in Marina Del Ray for a number of years and even before I was traded to LA, I lived in California.

<http://gty.im/53086483>

"I like the Southern California lifestyle. It's an active lifestyle, it's really geared towards healthy living and people are really active, they're outdoors and not sitting inside the whole time. So, that's one reason I enjoyed it there but at the same time, they have a really rabid fan base there.

"I wasn't there very long because while playing for the Kings, I was hurt. I had the hernia surgery and the shoulder after that. So, I wasn't 100 per cent and that's the only thing I regret there was not being totally healthy and playing at the level I was capable of playing. The fans, I thought, were always awesome. The lifestyle, like I said, is great out there. They've done a really good job- Luc Robitaille's done a really good job of growing hockey and the fan base in Southern California."

Sticking with hockey, Carter and I had a chance to talk about race in hockey and whether there's been much progress in recent years, especially with incidents involving the aforementioned Joel Ward and Wayne Simmonds, just to name a couple of examples.

"To be honest with you, I'd think we'd all be pretty naïve to think that racism doesn't exist in sports only because it exists in the real world and we would be dumb to think that it wouldn't exist in sports," Carter said matter-of-factly. "It's unfortunate every time it raises its ugly head in professional sports because you like to think people would know better but it never really surprises me. The main thing for myself – and I've encountered negative situations my whole life whether on the ice or off the ice – is don't let it affect the way you treat the next person you meet because there's always going to be an ignorant person out there and there's nothing you can do about that. All you can do is handle yourself with a great deal of pride and you just treat people the way you want to be treated and hopefully people will see the best in you.

"Now, as for those comments that happened to Wayne (Simmonds) and other guys, like I said, it's unfortunate but I think the league has done a better job of training and making sure their players are aware that we're a global game and it isn't just white and black. It's Swedish, it's French, it's German, you name it. Guys from all over the world play hockey so I think guys have to be better educated in terms of bringing people into your circle, into your locker room and making them feel like they're part of a family. But to be totally surprised it exists out there, I think it'd be ignorant to think that because racism exists in the real world."

I then asked Carter if he experienced a lot of bigotry growing up in hockey:

"No, there was never anything major," he answered before expanding. "At minor hockey tournaments, we would encounter some situations where it would be more frustrating coming from parents and other

players. Believe it or not, other parents would yell these racial comments to myself and other guys.

"I look back on it now and I always remember two or three black players on my team. I didn't think about it at the time but now I look back and there was always two or three of us that played on the same team, even when I played for the Wexford Raiders and we won the junior championship here (Toronto) and when I went to Michigan State, I think we had five black players. So, that continued into my time in the National Hockey League when I was in Edmonton and we had a number of black players as well.

"So, I always got the question when I went to school at Michigan State – How does it feel to be a black hockey player? – and I never really thought about it before and I couldn't tell you what it's like to be a white hockey player."

Carter then summarized his feelings in a way that would leave even most articulate of speakers in awe:

"I see the game from behind my eyes and that's it. So, I don't look at myself thinking, "Wow! Guess what? I'm a black hockey player!" because I can't see what's behind me. I mean, I know who I am, I'm proud of who I am but I just don't try to put it out there. People have to respect whether you play the game well or not. That's what it comes down to: Can you play? If you can play, it shouldn't matter what colour you are."

While I was always a fan of Anson Carter, the player– not to mention the beautiful dreadlocks he sported throughout the majority of his career (which, sadly, he has parted with) – it was his latter statement that has turned me into a fan of Anson Carter, the human being. Now, while I am the first to admit to how corny that sounds, it is nonetheless accurate as I would remiss if I failed to mention the charity Anson Carter is skating for on *Battle of the Blades: Shirt Off My Back*.

SOMB is a Los Angeles-based organization he helped form which is a clothing foundation formed to raise money to supply uniforms to underprivileged school children in Africa.

For more information on *Shirt Off My Back* or if you'd like to buy *SOMB* apparel, visit www.somb.com today.

From everything he has done, whether it was on the ice or off, Anson Carter is as professional as they come and that is one of the many reasons why the Toronto native is still so popular in his post-playing career – even if we never see those gorgeous dreadlocks again.