

SPEAKING WITH KINGS RADIO MAN NICK NICKSON

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A collage of Nick Nickson (Image credit: Chris Thomas)

This past week, I had the opportunity to speak with Nick Nickson who, since 1990, has been the radio voice of the Los Angeles Kings. Overall, Nickson, a native of Rochester, New York, has been with the Kings since 1981 when he was the television and radio broadcast partner of Bob Miller. I asked Nickson his thoughts on the Kings this season.

“It’s interesting because I was talking to (Kings’ captain) Dustin Brown earlier and he brought up the point of inconsistency,” Nickson said. “The Kings have been very good at home, great at home with 10 wins, the most in the NHL. But they’ve had the fewest wins on the road so far. They also only put together solid 50-minute games.”

If there was ever a time to use the old cliché of needing to play the full 60 minutes, it’s now. While the Kings certainly have gotten off to a respectable start to the year, it’s no secret that they haven’t quite played up to their full potential. But, according to Nickson, there are certain areas in the team’s game that have been working.

“The goaltending is good so far,” Nickson told me. “The club’s MVP so far has been Jonathan Quick and that comes as no surprise.

“The power play can be more consistent. The Kings also need to cut down on the shots against. They’ve averaged over 30 shots against per game,” Nickson continued before admitting that the shots against average is the most he has seen from the Kings in over a decade. He also added that Slava Voynov’s presence on the blue line is missed.



When I asked him about the state of the Kings' defensive unit and whether or not Willie Mitchell's departure has had a negative effect, Nickson was straight-forward with his response.

"There is a void there," the broadcaster responded before admitting that Mitchell's leaving the club in the off-season has hurt. "Last season, the Kings had to deal with the departure of (Rob) Scuderi, too," Nickson said before following that up with how the team got gradually better on the defensive side of things as the year progressed.

As for the positives of Los Angeles's defensive state, Nickson had a few reasons for Kings fans to keep their heads up.

"The development of (Jake) Muzzin has helped fill the void," he said. "Right now, the coaching staff is trying to figure out who gets slotted in. Possibly (Alec) Martinez or even (Brayden) McNabb can embrace the opportunity." The latter has certainly celebrated a productive November but more on that later.

As for Willie Mitchell and what he brought to the Kings, he "can shut down other team's top forwards, he kills penalties," Nickson added. But while fans in Los Angeles may not have any trouble admitting how much they miss Willie Mitchell, there really is no sense crying over spilled milk, so to speak. After all, as Nickson alluded to earlier, Rob Scuderi was another defensive defenseman whom Kings fans held in such high regard that they were worried once he returned to Pittsburgh in the summer of 2013. The trend is repeating itself in the wake of Willie Mitchell's departure but again, fans, with all due respect, will have to get over it sooner or later.

It may have been stating the obvious but Nick Nickson was correct when he said that, due to Mitchell's departure, in addition to Voynov's suspension, that "younger players get a chance to show what they can do." Brayden McNabb is starting to earn his keep in Los Angeles and even Jamie McBain is making his mark on the Los Angeles blue line. Their defense could be a lot better overall but hey, it could also be a lot worse.

Steering away from what's going on this season, I asked Mr. Nickson about his feelings on both of the Kings' Stanley Cup victories and how he compared them to each other.

"In 2012, it was a situation where they (the Kings) really established themselves, making themselves one of the best teams," he told me. "I expected them to win it all after Game 2 in St. Louis. They played that well."

As for the Cup-clincher, Nickson said "it was nice of them (the Kings) to stretch the lead to prepare the fans for the inevitable.

"As far as 2014 went, it was special with the rallying, the trailing and winning three Game 7's on the road which had never been done before. It was nerve-wracking but very rewarding as a broadcaster."



In his career as a hockey broadcaster, Nick Nickson has worked with quite a few partners. We already mentioned Bob Miller but Nickson also worked in the booth with two former Kings in Brian Engblom and Mike Allison in addition to 1998 Olympic gold-medallist Cammi Granato. However, a large part of Nickson's broadcasting career in hockey is tied to his partnership with Daryl Evans.

A former King and still a fan favourite in Los Angeles, Evans has been Nick Nickson's radio colour analyst for 15 seasons. Nickson, who has developed quite the rapport with Evans, explained why Evans is so invaluable to his broadcasts.

"It's always great to hear insights from players," he said. "Daryl understands the nuances of the game and why certain things happen."

From his partnerships to his contributions to his poignant observations on the play of the team he covers, Nick Nickson is without question an invaluable member of the Los Angeles Kings family.

For those fans who love to listen to the sounds of the game whether they're making their trek home or whether they love closing their eyes and listening to the play-by-play, Nickson's role makes the lives of the most die-hard of Kings fans that much richer.

Personally, it was a pleasure speaking to Mr. Nickson. As someone who has had a stutter since childhood, speaking on the phone has always been difficult. Mr. Nickson, however, was gracious enough to take time out of his busy schedule to talk to me and even more gracious to be as patient as he was with me and my speech impediment. That is something I never forget and as a result, I am eternally grateful.

For 33 years, Nick Nickson has done an admirable creating his own voice for the Los Angeles Kings. Here's hoping we can celebrate 33 more years.