

DISCUSSING ROB BLAKE, DEAN LOMBARDI AND LIFE IN HOCKEY WITH KINGS' JACK FERREIRA

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 18, 2014

This past weekend, the city of Toronto was buzzing with its festivities for the Hockey Hall of Fame inductions. 2014 represented a phenomenal class which, among others, included former Los Angeles Kings defenseman Rob Blake.

Now serving as the team's assistant general manager, this weekend has especially been a proud moment for the franchise, including everyone who works with him. One of Blake's colleagues was in Toronto on Monday to witness that night's induction ceremony, and I had the opportunity to sit down and have a relaxed conversation with him.

Jack Ferreira, Special Assistant to Kings' GM Dean Lombardi, has had a career that has spanned over four decades. Having been with the club since 2006, Ferreira has been an instrumental piece to the Kings' two Stanley Cup victories over the course of the last three seasons.

In addition to Rob Blake, Ferreira and I spoke about his relationship with Dean Lombardi in addition to his career before Los Angeles.

RC: You are here in Toronto for tonight's Hall of Fame festivities, watching Rob Blake getting officially inducted into hockey's Holiest shrine. Could you tell us about what this means to you seeing Mr. Blake get inducted? What are your feelings on the possibility of you getting inducted into the Hall one day?

JF: Me? Oh, God no, I don't even think about it. But as far as Rob is concerned, to have really watched him as a player, I admired him. Now for him to come in as management and work with him almost on a daily basis, he's just so down-to-earth, and the other thing is that he's so willing to learn. He asks a lot of questions, he always has time for everybody and for somebody who has reached the pinnacle of hockey like he has, he's just so well-rounded and the way he was brought up as a simple farm boy. He's like a sponge. He's so willing to learn and he doesn't pull punches. If he doesn't know something, you explain it to him. It's just the way he is.

RC: Not a lot but there are some Kings fans who have hard feelings towards Rob Blake because in 2008, he apparently didn't waive his no-trade clause by saying he wanted to finish his career in Los Angeles. But then in the summer, he signed with San Jose. Could you talk about this?

JF: No, that's wrong. He did, at the trade deadline, waive his no-trade clause. It's just that Dean (Lombardi) didn't get the deal that he wanted, so he wasn't traded. That's not right. He did. He said it was tough for him to do that but it just didn't materialize. The teams that Dean talked to were trying to steal Blake, so rather let him finish the year and let him make the decision.

RC: You are now in your ninth season with the Kings serving as the Special Assistant to GM Dean Lombardi and Assistant GM Rob Blake. I understand that part of your role includes overseeing what the team's area scouts find in preparation for the draft each year. How well do your scouts perform and what type of insight and expertise do you offer them in looking at prospects?

JF: My responsibility, it varies from year to year. My routine now is usually first month, two months of the season, I travel with the team and I just observe what I think we're doing right, what I think we're doing wrong, players I like, players who are struggling and just constantly staying in touch with our coaches and Dean (Lombardi). And then I go and I spend time with Manchester and a little bit with Ontario, our East Coast team, and I'll do reports on certain players and where they are, how close they are to playing for us, who I think where they fit in. Then I'll go back with the team again at the beginning of the year and then the second half of the season, it's just whatever Dean wants me to do. Maybe we'll have talks with another team about a trade so I might go watch somebody, I could go back and watch Manchester with some of the scouts to look at who they think will be first-year material. It's really almost week-to-week what I do, so it's whatever Dean wants me to do.

RC: Tell us about your feelings about the Kings winning the Stanley Cup in 2012 and 2014 both in terms of personal and collective satisfaction but also how you felt about the future of this team, especially with such promising talent like Tyler Toffoli and Tanner Pearson?

JF: Well, the first one everybody was just so excited. We knew how hard we had worked for four or five years. We came in in '06, won it in '12, so for six years, how much we had all put into it and finally- when we won it, it was just, like everybody else, hard to imagine. Here I was someone who had never played in the NHL to have your name on the Stanley Cup, great vision. But then I knew because of the scouting staff we had put together and after the first win, some of the players we had like (Tyler) Toffoli and Tanner (Pearson), we knew they were coming and from the first win, we wanted to return the whole team – and we did return the whole team – and now we had more prospects coming. It was encouraging. And then in '14, the way they did it was just unreal – the comeback against San Jose, three seven-game series, all on the road.

RC: You have the distinction of holding upper-management positions with each of the three California teams. You were the inaugural GM of both the San Jose Sharks and Mighty Ducks of

Anaheim before eventually joining the Kings. How was your time in both San Jose and Anaheim?

JF: When I lived in San Jose, I knew that was a home run. As soon as we got there, just the way we were received in the business community, and Silicon Valley was ready to explode, so I knew that was going to be a home run because of the way we had been received. We had a new building coming along, so we were at the Cow Palace, which wasn't bad for a player as it was that the sightlines weren't that great.

And Anaheim, that was the same thing. In Anaheim, it was a relatively new community, surrounding area and you had the Kings up the road. But when we came in, we had hurt the Kings because we took at least 2,000 season-ticket holders from there and switched over to us. And it's always been a great rivalry, but never to the extent that it is now because we had never met in the playoffs.

RC: When you were general manager of the Minnesota North Stars, your assistant was none other than Dean Lombardi. When you first joined the Kings, did it feel strange to be working for Mr. Lombardi? Have you two ever talked, or even joked, about the situation?

JF: No, not really. I've known Dean since he was about 17 years old, so before I got the Minnesota spot, Dean was working as an agent, so I'd run into him a lot telling him certain players I thought were really good and could go high in the draft. Then, when I got the interview, Dean and I sat down and he drilled me with questions to prepare me for my interview. I knew that if I got the GM job, I knew I was taking him as my assistant and it just worked out. He's really a brilliant guy and his attention to detail is bar-none. I've never worked with anybody who looks at every area and that has a lot to do with him being a lawyer, going through law school, his training. But Dean was a player, very bright guy, so he just fit in perfectly. So, we worked together for four of five years and then I went to Anaheim and, you know, we'd always cross paths. Then, when he got the job in LA, he asked me to come work for him and it was an easy decision.

RC: Your career has spanned four decades which includes many stops along the way, one of which was with the Calgary Flames as their US and college scout from 1980 to 1986. Even though you weren't with the team when they won the Stanley Cup in 1989, how much pride did you feel knowing that much of your work in scouting players – Gary Suter, Joel Otto, Paul Ranheim – helped form the championship team that year?

JF: Well, I had moved on. I had gone to the Rangers when they (the Flames) had won the Cup. But privately you take pride knowing that a lot of those players, you were there when they were drafted. (Joe) Nieuwendyk, Gary Sutter, Brett Hull, who was traded later, but he was there at the start of his career, Al MacInnis – you know, there were just so many of those players, Gary Roberts was another good one. I loved working for Calgary and (then-GM) Cliff Fletcher especially. He treated me fantastically.

RC: While in Anaheim, you helped lead the first-year Ducks to an expansion record 33 wins. You just narrowly missed the playoffs but there was a bright future for hockey in Anaheim. You built on that by drafting Paul Kariya and acquiring Teemu Selanne which, to the dismay of Kings fans, helped turn the Ducks into a playoff contender. While Bryan Murray, Brian Burke and Bob Murray have all had success as the team's GM in later years, how do you feel about your legacy as general manager of the Ducks looking back?

JF: Well, I have no qualms with the job I did in Anaheim. I had some issues with upper management which lead to my leaving, but as far as the players we put on the ice and the team we had on the ice and building that franchise, I have no qualms about that. It was fun. I mean that's what my whole career was: go to a franchise, start it from the beginning and go turn the franchise around like we did in Calgary, like we did in Minnesota. So, it was just what I enjoyed doing, and we're doing it now in LA.

RC: You began your management in 1972 with the New England Whalers of the WHA. A couple of years ago, I read Ed Willes's "The Rebel League" which was about the league and what shambles it was in, specifically from stories about players not getting paid to executives knowing little, if anything, about hockey.

How was your experience not only with the Whalers but in the league overall?

JF: The best way to describe that league was that was where the inmates ran the asylum. The players dictated everything. But as far as me, I was just a young kid out of college and I get this opportunity to work and I was having fun. My job was to scout, look for players and I loved that part of it. I worked for them for eight years and never missed a paycheck. We never missed a paycheck. I mean that was one thing about us because there were other teams that folded, teams like the (Minnesota) Fighting Saints with (head coach) Harry Neale. He'd tell you thousands of stories. But that's one thing: I worked for (Whalers owner) Howard Baldwin the whole time and never did we miss a paycheck.

RC: A few years ago, I read a story about a younger Teemu Selanne who, while in Anaheim under your watch, stealing the bus before a road trip and moving it from the front of the arena to a loading dock only to have the driver come outside panicking when he couldn't find it. Can you tell us more about this?

JF: What happened was we were taking the bus to the airport, to the charter, and the bus was in the front of the arena, so Teemu came out and the bus was running because the driver went inside to grab a cup of coffee. So, Teemu, being the practical joker that he is, he took it and drove it around to the back of the arena and the word had spread amongst the players, so they all knew where the bus was – in the back. So,

the driver comes out and there was nobody there. There's no bus, there's no players because everybody was in on the joke and he was in complete panic mode. Then, finally, someone clued him in.

He's never forgiven Teemu for that. It was the same driver then that's there now.

Not only did he give some great insight but Mr. Ferreira was a real pleasure to talk to, sitting there almost as if I were living vicariously as he recalls his career that saw him make stops in Hartford, Calgary, New York, Atlanta and Montreal, where he helped win a Stanley Cup for the Canadiens in 1993.

The man responsible for kicking off the existence of the San Jose Sharks and then making an expansion Mighty Ducks club look like a veteran team that had played together for so many years.

He was there for the duration of the World Hockey Association's unique, yet problematic, existence, has traveled across Canada and the United States more times than he can keep track of to discover some of the finest players the NHL has known and he is no exception to my belief that when it comes to a championship team, no role is any less important than the next. Jack Ferreira fits that bill to a T.

Teams like the Calgary Flames and Minnesota North Stars were made better because of Jack Ferreira's contributions. The same thing can be said today for the Los Angeles Kings. After all, from his vast expertise to his overall love of the sport, Jack Ferreira is – and always has been – an invaluable asset to any organization lucky enough to have him on board.