

BOB MILLER ON LA KINGS MISSING PLAYOFFS: "I HOPE THEY WERE UPSET"

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LOS ANGELES, CA – JUNE 14: Los Angeles Kings play-by-play television announcer Bob Miller addresses the fans as General Manager Dean Lombardi (bottom right) and Assistant to the General Manager Jack Ferreira (bottom left) look on during the rally in Staples Center after the Los Angeles Kings Stanley Cup Victory Parade on June 14, 2012 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Victor Decolongon/Getty Images)

It is hard to imagine that after this coming season, the **Los Angeles Kings** will be celebrating their golden anniversary in the **National Hockey League**. For nearly 50 years, the Kings have been a staple in southern California. While many would argue that they didn't achieve mainstream success until the arrival of **Wayne Gretzky** in 1988, the Kings fanbase was nonetheless substantial. From **Bob Pulford** and **Roger Nielson** to **Marcel Dionne** and **Luc Robitaille**, so many of the game's greatest names have been a part of this great organization. None, however, are as synonymous with the Los Angeles Kings than the exclusive television voice of the team, **Mr. Bob Miller**.

Entering what will be his 43rd season with the Kings, Miller means to the Kings what **Vin Scully** means to the **Dodgers** and what **Chick Hearn** meant to the **Lakers**. Bob Miller is and has always been a fan favourite in Los Angeles due largely to the fact that every fan I speak to — and there have been plenty — adamantly describe the man in the warmest fashion. Bob Miller's status as a fan favourite, however, is also due to his extraordinary expertise on the game coupled with his unique brand of wisdom from a storied career in the Kings' broadcasting booth.

While insight from management, coaches and players is certainly important, insights from a man who studies the game while calling it night after night is, in itself, an invaluable asset. Bob Miller thoroughly fits that bill.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Miller about the Kings and what went wrong last season, asking if fatigue played a significant factor in the club's playoff miss. In addition, Mr. Miller offered his insights on how the silver-and-black will fare this coming season, especially with the off-season acquisition of Milan Lucic.

"Yes, I believe the Kings missing the playoffs last year was due largely to fatigue," Miller told me. "They had played more playoff games in three seasons than any team in the NHL — 64 — and there were times during the regular season that I thought they look exhausted and there were other times where I thought they were playing just the way they needed to play to win the Stanley Cup once again."

"Case in point was a game late in the season on a road trip to New York where they won in New Jersey, in Madison Square Garden against the Rangers, which I think was the best game of their trip. Then they won in Long Island, then they went and lost to Minnesota who had played the night before and then lost to Chicago who had played the night before. So, the last trip where they could have beaten Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary and gotten into the playoffs, they did not beat Edmonton or Calgary and got knocked out."

After losing a tough home game to Vancouver on March 21, the outlook seemed a bit more grim for Kings fans. While they were still in decent position to clinch a playoff spot, a win against the Canucks, who were leading the Kings by a small margin in the Pacific standings at that point, would have helped immensely. Unfortunately, costly penalties from Drew Doughty and Tyler Toffoli helped set the tone for the Canucks to capitalize, ultimately winning the game. However, the Kings then hit the road for their aforementioned three-game tour of New York, beating the Devils, Rangers and Islanders before heading to the North Star State with a fair deal of momentum.

Approaching their Saturday night contest (March 28) in Minnesota, the excitement became a bit more prevalent as the Kings were looking to capitalize against a Wild club who, as Miller said, had played the previous night. The Kings, unfortunately, came out flat, losing 4-1 before losing in Chicago two nights later to another team who had played just the previous night. While they did win their next two, the Kings were blanked in their three-game tour of Western Canada, as Miller mentioned, officially eliminating them from playoff contention.

"I think the three consecutive seasons of playing long into June with short offseasons really took its toll," Miller continued. "And, of course, also a factor was Slava Voynov, who's an outstanding defenseman, not being available because of his legal situation. So, all of that had its effect and Willie Mitchell going to Florida, he was a big part of those Stanley Cup championships. So, I think the long offseason is going to benefit the Kings this year and I hope they were upset sitting watching the playoffs and realized they were not in."

)Photo credit: Stephen Dunn/Getty Images)

The Los Angeles Kings will enter the 2015-16 season looking a bit different. While the core remains intact, the silver-and-black have parted ways with a few players who were integral in both of their championship victories in recent years. Arguably the most notable absence is 2014 Conn Smythe winner **Justin Williams** who left for the nation's capital this summer. **Jarret Stoll** has since moved on to Broadway while **Mike Richards's** underachieving tenure in Los Angeles is over, although the drama has not reached a conclusion

just yet. The future of the aforementioned **Slava Voynov** is still up in the air while the defensive situation became a bit more dire when **Robyn Regehr** announced his retirement but especially when **Andrej Sekera** bolted for **Edmonton** after the Kings paid a fairly high price to acquire his services at last season's trade deadline. The Kings did, however, sign **Christian Ehrhoff** which should give the club some much-needed depth — in addition to a plethora of experience — on the back end.

Sticking with the plus side, the Kings will be welcoming some new faces to the fold. **Jordan Weal** is expected to make a serious push to make the big club following his phenomenal year in **Manchester** while defenseman **Derek Forbort** seems closer to showing off his skills in Los Angeles after a five-year wait. However, the biggest acquisition the Kings made this season came in the form of the 6' 3, 228-pound winger **Milan Lucic**.

FILE – In this Nov. 28, 2014, file photo, Boston Bruins' Milan Lucic pauses during his team's NHL hockey game against the Winnipeg Jets in Boston. The Bruins traded Lucic to the Los Angeles Kings on Friday, June 26, 2015, for defenseman Colin Miller, goalie Martin Jones and the 13th pick in the NHL draft. (AP Photo/Winslow Townson, File)

Lucic, who the Kings acquired from the Boston Bruins in June, is an established all-around player who even has a Stanley Cup ring to his name. Definitely one of the most polarizing figures in hockey, Lucic is, like (Kings' captain) **Dustin Brown**, a player opposing fans love to hate but would love if he played for their own team. I asked Bob Miller for his thoughts on the acquisition of Lucic.

"The Kings getting Milan Lucic, I think, was an excellent deal," Miller told me. "I would always trade a draft choice, unless it's No. 1 or 2 or even higher and be the 13th, I'd always trade a draft choice for an established player because you know what you're going to get. The

draft choice, it may be two or three or even longer seasons before they're ready to play in the NHL and what you're getting now is an excellent player who they're talking about putting on a line with (Anze) Kopitar and (Marian) Gaborik.

"I think his presence there because of his size, the physicality of the way he plays is going to open up a lot of room for Kopitar and Gaborik. So, I think it was a good deal."

Miller then discussed his feelings on netminder Martin Jones, who the Kings had traded to Boston for Lucic, before the B's dealt him to **San Jose** just days later.

"I know [the Kings] hated to let go of Martin Jones," Miller said matter-of-factly. "He's an excellent goalie but he was looking at another year of playing just a handful of games behind Jonathan Quick and it will be interesting now because the Kings open the regular season against San Jose and Martin Jones was traded from Boston to San Jose, so that should be an interesting home-opener for the Kings."

There was a palpable thrill when first hearing the news of Milan Lucic's acquisition. Some Kings fans weren't immediately sold on the trade, however. After all, in addition to Martin Jones, the Kings traded the 13th-overall draft pick in 2015 and a bona fide defensive prospect in **Colin Miller**, so the thought of trading a blueliner especially after the struggles the Kings had in said department last season was a little harder to digest. With that said, Lucic's contributions speak for themselves.

While his 18 goals and 26 assists in 81 games last season were subpar by his standards, Lucic has proven how much of an asset he is when he's on the ice. While his +13 rating last season was very respectable, it was a drop from his career-high of +30 in 2013-14. Still, Lucic is very dependable as he dished out 259 hits last season — 19 more than his previous campaign. Plus, over the last five regular seasons, the 27-year-old missed only nine games. So, while the loss of man games was their Achilles' heel in the early 2000's, the Kings' exceptional health was an instrumental factor in their championship success in recent years.

For fans who have spent the majority of the summer asking, "Is it October yet?", the start of the 2015-16 regular season cannot come any sooner. Yet, while last spring's playoff miss was certainly a tough pill to swallow, the dedication from fans of the silver-and-black has not wavered in the slightest.

While the playoff success of the Manchester Monarchs and even the Ontario Reign provided welcomed distractions, fans were still upset when watching the NHL playoffs knowing that their team was not in it, just as Bob Miller had hoped from the players.

Just weeks away from training camp and just over a month away from the start of the regular season, Bob Miller, the Los Angeles Kings and their fans are ready to start fresh. After all, once the puck drops at **STAPLES Center** on the evening of October 7, you can be sure that everyone donning the silver and black will have tossed out their rear-view mirrors because, let's face it, what good is it holding onto something when you no longer need it?