

# MEET DUSTY IMOO: LA KINGS' NEW GOALTENDING DEVELOPMENT COACH

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 November 16, 2015



*Photo credit: Dusty Imoo*

While they have celebrated ultimate success in recent years, a large portion of the **Los Angeles Kings'** transition into a perennial championship contender is attributed to their strength in goal. **Bill Ranford** has done a phenomenal job as the club's Goaltending Coach over the years with the development of the likes of **Jonathan Bernier**, **Martin Jones** and most notably, **Jonathan Quick**. However, like any position, depth in goal does not end with the present.

As is the case in any sport, building for the future is the lifeblood of any successful organization. For the past eight seasons, **Kim Dillabaugh** has been the Kings' Goaltending Development Coach and like Ranford, did an outstanding job in helping to hone the skills of those netminders — aforementioned or not — drafted by the Kings. This season, though, the silver-and-black have a new man at the latter position: Dusty Imoo.



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To say that Imoo has big shoes to fill in Los Angeles would be an understatement, but the 45-year-old has had a plethora of experience as a goaltender and now as a coach, especially in his most recent role before arriving to Los Angeles.

Prior to joining the Kings, Imoo held the same role for the **Winnipeg Jets** helping develop the club's up-and-coming talent in goal for their **AHL** affiliate at the time, the **St. John's IceCaps**.

"While I was in Winnipeg, I had some good prospects," Imoo said. "I had **Michael Hutchinson**, who started in Ontario in the ECHL, the first year and we went to the Calder Cup Finals. Hutch worked his way up and is now



with the Jets."

Upon joining the Kings, Imoo was already familiar with current **Ontario Reign** netminder **Peter Budaj** who spent last season with the Jets' farm club. I asked the new coach about Budaj and what differences he sees in the veteran from last season to this.

"Sometimes as goalies, we lose the feel, or mojo, if you will, and I think Peter just had one of those years," Imoo explained. "Through it all, Peter was a trooper and constantly worked with me in trying to find his game. This season, I think he came in to camp with no contract and a healthy pressure to earn a spot and prove to himself that he can still play. It's been great that we are back together. It's been fun."



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Imoo continued, discussing other netminders he has helped in developing within the Jets organization. One of those goaltenders, **Eric Comrie**, is a product of Newport Beach, Calif., who played minor hockey for the **LA Selects** (now **LA Junior Kings**).

"Last year I had Budaj and **(Connor) Hellybuyck**. Helly ended up having an all-star season and an all-star World Championship as well. I also had Eric Comrie who is now with Helly in the AHL."

Over the course of his playing career, Dusty Imoo spent the vast majority of it in Japan, including the 1998 Winter Olympics where he earned the privilege of suiting up for the host nation.



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"I played 15 years, the last 12 were in Japan," Imoo said. "I think it was in '94 that [Hockey Canada guru] Dave King was hired by the Japanese Ice Hockey Federation to build a program and coach the Olympic Team for the '98 Olympics in Nagano."

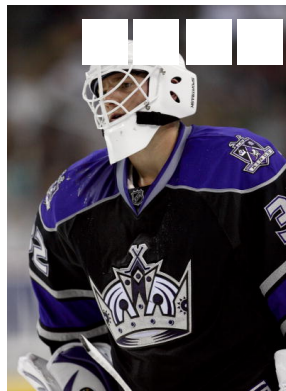
"Since they were the host, they would get a team, but at that time, they were a B-pool team and sought out Dave to make the team competitive. His idea was to find pros playing in North America that had Japanese descent, bring them over, put them in the pro league there and try and get them their passports. I think he found 11 of us and six of us ended up on the Olympic team. It was an easy decision for me because I got married my first year pro and had three kids already — I have four now, and grandkids — so I left the dream here. The plan was to play until the Olympics were over and come back, but they treated my family and I so well, and the money was

*Photo used with permission from Dusty Imoo*

so good that I shut the dream down and stayed for 12 seasons. I played in one Olympics and four World Championships and had the time of my life there.

"So, no regrets. Well, not much," Imoo chuckled.

With all of the success the Los Angeles Kings have had between the pipes over the last few years, it seems hard to believe that less than a decade ago, the same club had the dubious distinction of going through goaltenders like a person would go through socks. Of course, while that is a slight fabrication, the Kings' goaltending situation was nonetheless an abysmal one.



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Between 2006 and 2008, the Kings went through 11 different goaltenders. Among them, thankfully, was Jonathan Quick who would, in short time, become the team's clear-cut starter. Even prior to Quick's emergence, the Kings had **Erik Ersberg**, who provided reliable goaltending for the club during their rebuilding phase. Since then, the aforementioned Jonathan Bernier and Martin Jones established themselves to the point where they have earned starting jobs elsewhere. Even **Ben Scrivens** who, despite being a King for just a brief period, stepped in and flourished — along with Jones — when Quick was injured in late 2013.

Of course, while Dillabaugh did leave a positive mark on the Kings, the club is just as excited for his successor, and vice-versa.

"I couldn't have asked for a better transition," Imoo told me. "It's been a blessing to join the Kings organization. They really have made me feel welcome and a part of the team. Both the Kings staff and the Ontario staff have been awesome."

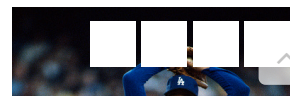
In fact, Imoo isn't feeling the pressures of filling big shoes. Instead, the ex-netminder is thrilled for the next step in his coaching career.

"No pressure really. Just excited," Imoo said. "I feel having had some success in Winnipeg probably made the move easier. The fact that the Kings are a winning organization just makes me honored, not nervous."

Of course, while his priorities will be on the ice, Imoo admits that there are ulterior motives to being in Los Angeles. Being a long-time **Dodgers** fan, for one, certainly doesn't hurt.

"I have been a Dodger fan since Yeager, Garvey, and my man FERNANDO!!!! [sic]. Loved it when (Hideo) Nomo came to the team, as well."

But Imoo has another reason for loving Los Angeles.



"The sunshine and palm trees doesn't hurt either. Vitamin D for the soul," Imoo said laughing.

As we wrapped up our discussion, this writer, who was born in the Newfoundland capital of St. John's, asked Dusty Imoo, who was born in New Westminster, B.C., which coast's seafood he prefers.



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"I've been to quite a few places in St. John's," said Imoo. "Loved *The Duke*. The seafood chowder at *The Delta* was very good. *Basho Japanese Restaurant* was good. Seafood in general was awesome there. But, I love my salmon in B.C."

So, there you have it. While he definitely enjoyed what St. John's had to offer, nothing can top the seafood quality from home for Dusty Imoo.

Ladies and gentlemen, meet the new Goaltending Development Coach for the Los Angeles Kings; and for those Kings fans who are also Dodgers fans, should you run into Mr. Imoo whether at **STAPLES Center, Toyota Sports Center** or on the street, be sure to remind him of how much you loved **Fernando Valenzuela**. But first, be sure to give the new coach a friendly

*Photo used with permission from Dusty Imoo*

hello. You may just hit it off talking about not only the Dodgers but goaltending or even the importance of Vitamin D. This writer, once an avid jersey collector, mentioned how beautiful Japan's jerseys from the Nagano Games were. Imoo wholeheartedly agreed.

So, when the Kings are up against Eric Comrie in the near future or when, and if, Patrik Bartosak gives Jonathan Quick a run for his money for the Kings' starting job, you can thank Mr. Imoo not only for his work with developing netminders but for helping Kings fan forget their team's aforementioned — and infamous — goaltending carousel.