

STEELHEADS HOPE TO EXTEND MOMENTUM IN OHL FINAL VS. OTTERS

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 May 10, 2017

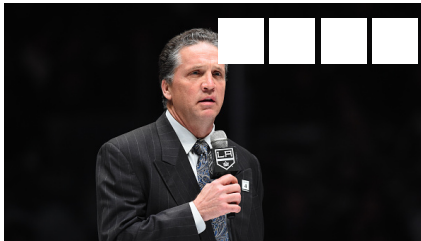


Photo credit: Ryan Cowley

After the **Los Angeles Kings** missed the playoffs for the second time in three years last month, fans have had plenty of reason to be skeptical.

On the precipice of a dynasty, the Kings have been nothing short of disappointing since 2014. Yes, they had some highlights here and there but for the most part, it's been an underwhelming ride. So, with that last month's playoff miss, the Kings enter an off-season full of unanswered questions.

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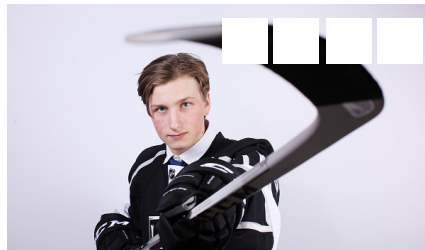
The **firing** of GM **Dean Lombardi** and head coach **Darryl Sutter**, while it was due, signaled the end of an era in Los Angeles — arguably the most successful in team history. With that said, it's only natural for those close to the team to feel reluctant about the future. But, there are aspects where the Kings' future is nothing short of exciting, and that is largely attributed to the club's prospect pool. Two of those prospects, in fact, are representing the dark-horse **Mississauga Steelheads** in this year's **OHL Final**.

It was early in the new year when the Steelheads had the worst record in the Ontario Hockey League, but they turned things around rather quickly, ultimately **locking down** top spot in the league's **Central Division**. So,



while the division was considerably weaker than the other three, the Steelheads finished the year with a 20-point lead on the second-place **Sudbury Wolves**, who finished the campaign seven games under .500. Still, for those who thought the Steelheads would enjoy nothing more than a cup of coffee this postseason, they were quickly proven wrong.

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Getting past **Ottawa** and **Oshawa** in six games each, the Steelheads made short work of **Peterborough**, sweeping the **Petes** in four games to advance to their first-ever OHL Final.

In the Final, they meet the **Erie Otters** whose **103 points** were the best in the OHL this season. Their 50-15-2-1 record speaks volumes to just how intimidating they are — even in the post-**Connor McDavid** era — but backed by players, including former Kings prospect **Erik Cernak**, the Otters' experience is one of the most important factors in helping to make them the favourites in this series.

Through the first two games, the Otters lived up to their billing as they won both contests, although the Steelheads would not give an inch at any time.

As for the current Kings prospects, defenseman **Jacob Moverare** and speedy forward **Spencer Watson** have each played integral roles in helping the Steelheads reach the OHL Final.

This writer has had the pleasure of watching Moverare all season long and while his rookie campaign did start off a bit slow, the Swedish blueliner wasted little time in taking off.

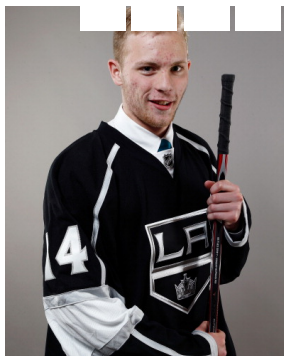
Notorious for being a weak skater, Moverare spent the season working hard to fix that. Already possessing a solid defensive prowess and building on his physical game, Moverare's skating improvement has helped him shoot up the Steelheads' depth chart to the club's top defensive pairing.

Yet, while his offensive numbers aren't his biggest selling point, Moverare nonetheless notched 30 assists in 63 games during the regular season, scoring two goals along the way. But, Moverare's plus-21 rating was enough to show just how crucial his on-ice presence was, and is. In addition, collecting just 20 penalty minutes during the season has proven just how well-disciplined the 18-year-old is. But, Moverare's offensive contributions didn't stop when the season drew to a close.

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Through 18 games, Moverare has already matched his goals total in these playoffs while adding five assists. In fact, his sound defensive play and even his ability to elude opponents is what has helped the Steelheads become so successful this season, especially on Monday when the Steelheads **won Game 3**, coming back to defeat Erie by a 4-3 count.

Teammate Spencer Watson is also maximizing his time with the Steelheads, although he is at the tailend of his junior career.

In what is his overage season, the 21-year-old Watson is drawing more short-term attention than his fellow Kings prospect.

Having been acquired from the **Kingston Frontenacs** earlier this season, Spencer Watson joined the Kings having recuperated from off-season wrist surgery. All Watson did was score a hat-trick in his Steelheads debut before scoring 28 goals and 53 points in 41 regular-season games. But Watson continued to shine once the playoffs started, scoring 14 goals and 23 points in 18 games,

On Monday night, the Steelheads opened the game with a 2-0 lead before surrendering three-straight goals. However, on the verge of going down 0-3 in the series, the Steelheads scored twice in the third period to make this year's OHL Final a bit more interesting. Now, heading into Wednesday night's Game 4, the Steelheads can turn this series into a best-of-three and take control of the momentum.

For that to happen, though, they will need a full effort from everyone, including Moverare and Watson. Of course, if everything up to this point is any indication, the Steelheads shouldn't have anything to worry about.