

Lessons from St. Louis...A visit with Andy Murray
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The thought of going to St. Louis to hang out with Andy Murray, Head Coach of the St. Louis Blues NHL team, is at first an intimidating and exciting opportunity. It is an opportunity that not too many people get to have, the privilege to be able to learn from one of the most respected coaches in the NHL was an experience that promised to not disappoint. The lessons that I learned on this trip will stay with me for ever and they not only will influence the way I coach, they will also influence the way I live my life. They are lessons not of technical ability or tactical poise, but of those areas of coaching that are often hidden or overlooked. Lessons of humility, relationships, accountability, preparation & attention to detail, and "turn the page" ran true throughout our stay which encompassed three games and various team practice skates. The following is a glimpse into how each lesson resonated with me. My hope is to pass along what I was so fortunate to experience.

LESSON #1 - HUMILITY

The lesson of humility is evident as soon as you meet Coach Murray. His unassuming manner that he carries himself with would not immediately say, "here is one of the most respected NHL coaches who has coached Canada's national teams in national championships as well as the Olympics. The only time I saw him wear any clothing with the Blues emblem on it was when he was on the ice during their pre-game skate. At all other times he did not once wear any clothing that established him as an NHL head coach. He spoke softly but firmly with a sense of sternness that was respectable as well as responsible. Whenever he was asked for an autograph he thanked the individual for asking and thanked them for their interest. He continuously made it a priority to ask everyone he spoke with how they were doing and focused on the other person with sheer genuine attentiveness. It appeared as though he viewed it as a privilege to be in a position whereby people recognize him and ask for his autograph or to shake his hand. He never forgets where he came from, continuously referring to Manitoba as his home, even with the media during interviews. What I learned from the lesson of humility is simply, know who you are, be who you are, accept others as they are, and approach every day with a sense of privilege that we are fortunate enough to be able to do what we do.

LESSON #2 - RELATIONSHIPS

This is a lesson that is suitably listed after the lesson of humility. The lesson of relationships directed my focus to how Andy formulated the environment to facilitate interpersonal relationships with all those involved. In addition to approaching everyone every day, one of the most significant artifact that stood out to me was the Blues team picture. Commonly a hockey team picture will include players, coaches, training staff, and a few others who are directly involved at ice level during the games. The Blues team picture included EVERYONE, along with ALL the players and coaches and direct team staff; it included the marketing staff, the ticket sales staff, the receptionists, the administration, the equipment managers, the game day office promotional staff, and more. This was a resounding artifact to me because it spoke to how Andy views everyone's role within the greater picture as equally important to the success of the team.

LESSON #3 - ACCOUNTABILITY

This lesson is a fundamental piece of many facets of our lives and it was no different within my observations during a pre-game skate. There was a strong sense of responsibility and accountability in the dressing room area. Everyone knew what their role was *and* they held each other accountable to those roles and responsibilities within the team. During a pre-game skate a player was forced to stop and repeat a portion of a drill, not because it was done in-correctly but because of the effort following an errand pass. There had been other errand passes during the drill but this was the only time the drill was stopped, and it was because instead of pursuing the puck with a sense of urgency, the player let up and slowed down. The player was held accountable for his effort during this situation and from my observations it had a profound affect on the remainder of the player's execution. This is a simple, yet significant example of how the issue of accountability was evident within the team environment.

LESSON #4 - PREPARATION & ATTENTION TO DETAIL

During my stay in St.Louis and my experiences with Andy Murray one of the things that I was in awe to was the amount of preparation that Andy and his staff put into each and every day during our stay, even on the off game day. Everything within the whole process of the day was planned out and accounted for. There were team meetings and video sessions, lead by the assistant coaches which covered the plan for the game that evening. What were the other team's tendencies, what are some areas that need to be addressed, and the reinforcement of specific principles were all covered. The meetings were to the point, precise, and productive. During the off day, preparation was already being done for games 2-3 games deeper in the schedule. Video was reviewed for every opponent, line match-ups were communicated, and focal points for each game were shared. Andy would have coach meetings everyday, full team meetings, line meetings, 1 on 1's when required, and special teams meetings. The amount of communication between players and coaches was very clear.

LESSON #5 - TURN THE PAGE...

Turning the page is simply, "Parking" something and moving on to the next step in the overall process. This lesson rang true during a post game interview after the first game of that home stand. The Blues had just lost in overtime after surrendering a third period lead. During this interview, the media were asking questions all related to what went wrong, and Andy simply answered, "I do not have time. I do not have time to dwell on tonight, it is done and we have to play Phoenix in less than 24 hours". Although the media kept trying, Andy stood strong and remained firm in that he and his team had to *Turn the Page* and focus on what they had to accomplish the next evening against Phoenix. All too often we tend to dwell on the negative as well as the positive and it has the potential to cloud our judgement for the next step in the process. Andy's ability to Turn the page on that evening was reassuring and inspiring even just by listening to his words; "the great thing about sports is that you do not have to wait long until your next opportunity...". The St. Louis Blues were able to come out and earn 2 points the next evening against Phoenix...lessons learned.