

A Tale of Two Coaches

Marquette learned from 'mentors'

By JIM SWANSON

Prince George Free Press

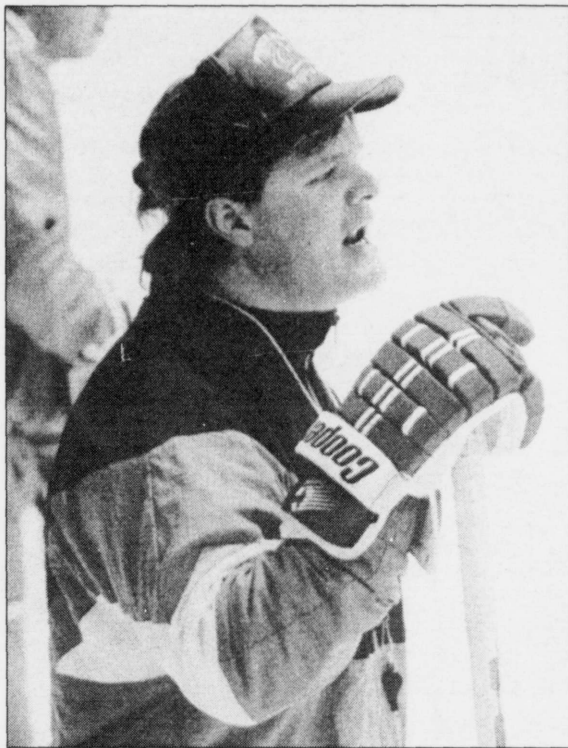
As a team known for its tradition in the Prince George hockey landscape, the Prince George Spruce Kings couldn't have found a better man for behind the bench.

Dale Marquette, who played all his minor hockey in Prince George, has his team at the top of the Rocky Mountain Junior Hockey League standings in just his second year coaching the Kings. It's a situation that fits like a glove for all involved.

"I like what I'm doing," says Marquette, who is trying to avoid doing some of the same things coaches did to him when he was playing junior and minor pro.

"What I'm trying to do is something I didn't have a lot of when I played, and that's communicating with the players. All the coaches I had would rather play mind games than sit down and talk to the player and say exactly what's going on. It's tough for a 16-year-old kid to go home and try to figure out something that he's never been around before."

Marquette's open door policy has paid off in a big way so far this season, as the Kings are threatening to run away and hide with the Peace-Cariboo division of the RMJHL. Marquette's club lost only one of their first 14 games, establishing a 12 point divisional lead with less than one third of the season expired.



Marquette: 'To coach the Cougars... would be the ultimate situation for me because I love Prince George.' ROB BIRON/FREE PRESS

"If somebody had told me what our record was going to be after 18 games I'd be pretty happy," says Marquette, a high scoring left winger with the Brandon Wheat Kings from 1986-88 who was drafted by Chicago in the 1987

NHL entry draft.

"But if you're in on those games and know what took place with our work ethic, then you'd know the team can do more."

After retiring as a player, Marquette was so disillusioned with

the politics of pro hockey that he refused to watch the game on television for almost two years. Surprisingly, he says that underhanded back room dealings that force kids out of the game at the minor hockey level get worse when contracts are involved.

"There's just so much politics in hockey, and as the levels get higher it gets worse," he says, claiming that a couple dozen players currently toiling in the minors deserve to be on NHL rosters.

"I got frustrated and I hated the game, so I left it - in my mind I'd just had enough of it. Now, I think coaching is more up my alley than playing, and I enjoy it. I'm a better coach than I was a player, and I expect a lot out of myself."

Marquette doesn't look back to any of his coaches as good examples of how to lead a hockey team. In fact, he has mostly negative opinions about the men he played for, guys like Darryl Sutter in the Blackhawks system and Marc Pezzin in Brandon.

"I probably watched Sutter the most in Indianapolis," Marquette recalls.

"We won the IHL championship with him. There were a lot of good things I took from him, but also a lot of things I threw out. He wasn't a very good communicator as far as letting the players know where they stood, but he was a heck of a motivator and very intense."

Like the players he directs,

Marquette has goals of his own. Every athlete with a competitive nature has the inner drive to improve and succeed, and it's no different with the 26-year-old coach of the Spruce Kings. He's not campaigning for the job, but he wouldn't mind being in Cougar coach Doug Hobson's skates.

"I'd like to do this as a career. I played long enough and had enough ups and downs as a player, but I think I communicate well with the players," says Marquette.

"I would say my goal is to coach in the Western Hockey League. To coach the Cougars someday would be the ultimate situation for me because I love Prince George, and that's the bottom line. I love it here, and I'm not interested in coaching in the BCJHL at this point."

Marquette is discovering that the most challenging aspect of coaching is finding the different buttons that make each individual player get the most of their ability, and motivating can be even more difficult if you choose not to play mind games.

"You feel like you're in control of a big video game, and the chains that you pull are going to help your hockey club. It's the players show and they have to do everything, but the major kick is motivating."

Look for the Spruce Kings to continue their successful ways - mixing motivation and tradition together is a winning combination..

Hobson staying the course

After 14 games of the current Western Hockey League season, the Prince George Cougars had the same record, 3-11, that cost Archie Henderson the head coaching job in Victoria a year earlier.

The situation is something that present coach Doug Hobson, who took over from Henderson, knows all too well - but you won't find him hiding in one of the Coliseum's many nooks and crannies trying to avoid the ax.

"When we were 0-8 and 0-9 some media guys were trying to turn the heat up a bit on me, but I'm confident I'm not going anywhere," says Hobson. If he is concerned, his face certainly doesn't show it.

"As long as the guys are working hard and coming to play every night, then you can't blame the coach. It's just not something that I worried about, because if you

worry about getting fired, you're going to get fired."

Despite opening the season with ten straight losses, Hobson is comfortable with his situation with the Cougars. Sure, excuses are like belly buttons - everybody has one - but most of the people who have been eager to fork out \$13 per game would let Hobson place a portion of the blame on a rash of early season injuries.

"We did have seven veterans out of the lineup at one time, but there was no quit and everyone just kept working," says Hobson, one of the youngest coaches in the league at age 26.

"It wasn't any fun but, from my standpoint, there were still good things happening, as hard as it is to rationalize 3-11. It's hard, there's no question about that. You start to second-guess the players and your own decisions, but deep

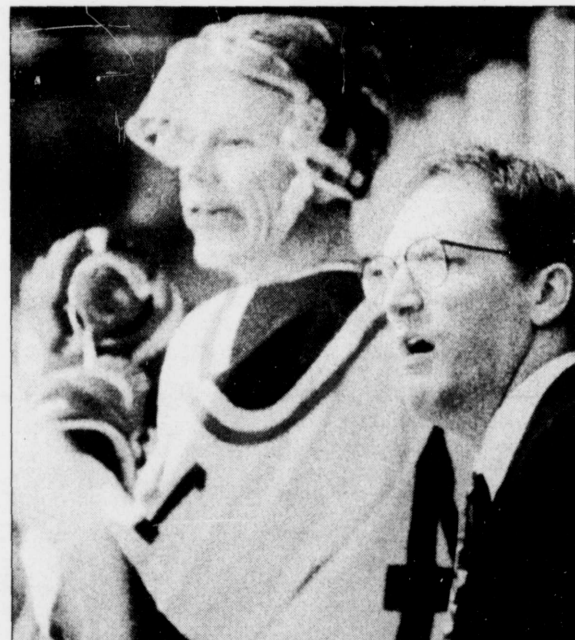
down you know what you have and you know that once you get players back you'll have a lot of depth. You just have to believe what you're doing is right."

Because he is only six years older than his oldest players, Hobson finds that he's not far removed from the problems that face his young charges. Surprisingly, he is also the most senior member of club management, when you think in terms of time spent in the Cougar organization. Put it all together, and Hobson views himself as a good choice to lead the franchise out of desolation and into the promised land.

Or at least the playoffs.

"I'm a player's coach, because I'm young enough that I can relate to the players," says Hobson, who was drafted out of Prince Albert by the

Turn to Hobson, C8



Hobson: Some difficult times in the early part of the season

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