

Hamilton Bulldogs coach Guy Boucher has life, education experience

By David Karp (CP) – Nov 5, 2009

HAMILTON, Ont. — There was a time when Hamilton Bulldogs coach Guy Boucher thought he might die.

Boucher was playing for the Quebec Rafales of the now-defunct International Hockey League, when he came down with a virus that affected the nerves on the right side of his body.

"I went from being in the best shape of my life to not being able to walk up stairs. I could hardly see out of my right eye and I had no strength on my right side," he said. "I couldn't read for more than five or 10 minutes because I'd puke."

After almost five years Boucher recovered, and while the illness ended a promising playing career, it also helped launch a promising coaching career.

"It changed the way I looked at life. Hockey was everything, but all of a sudden I wasn't even thinking about hockey any more. I was just wondering if I was going to live," Boucher said.

"I decided I was going to do what I like to do, because you figure out that life can be pretty short. And what I like to do is teach."

As he recovered from his sickness, Boucher joined the McGill Redmen as an assistant coach. Mathieu Darche, now Hamilton's interim captain, was playing for McGill when Boucher started his coaching career.

"He was there my sophomore year (in 1997) and I went from zero goals to 21 goals in 26 games," said Darche. "Guy was one of the big reasons why. He would stay after practice and work on my shot."

Success at McGill led to an assistant coaching job with the Rouyn-Noranda Huskies of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League for three years, followed by three seasons as an assistant with the Rimouski Oceanic, where Boucher coached Sidney Crosby. He took over as head coach of the QMJHL's Drummondville Voltigeurs in 2006, leading them to the league title last season and winning the league's award for personality of the year.

Boucher was also an assistant coach for Canada's national under-18 team three times and was an assistant to Pat Quinn at the 2009 world junior championships.

Now, the 37-year-old is in his first season coaching pro hockey, leading the Montreal Canadiens' farm team this year. If there's a learning curve in his jump to the American Hockey League, Boucher's team isn't showing it. With a record of 7-0-1-3, the Bulldogs are the only team yet to be defeated in regulation.

As one of the most educated coaches in pro hockey, Boucher comes prepared for the job. He has two bachelor degrees - in history and biosystems engineering - from McGill. He also has a master's of sports psychology from the University of Montreal.

"The history degree gives you perspective of where people have been, where people are going, and how they react," Boucher said. "It gave me a way to look at things in a more global perspective, and that helps in hockey."

Boucher's engineering background allows for a more mechanical perspective of hockey.

"All the movements that hockey players do - the torques that they do with shooting and their transfer of weight - basically, they are vectors," Boucher said. "It has really helped me segment and break down movements of players."

With his unique background, it's not surprising that Boucher's team plays a very unorthodox brand of hockey.

"His system is unlike anything I've ever seen before," said Darche, who has played for four NHL teams and six minor-league teams. "It's very new-age and I think it works. It's five men everywhere. It's not one or two guys here and there." Boucher has changed since his early coaching days with McGill. Martin Raymond, one of Boucher's assistant coaches in Hamilton, should know. Raymond was the head coach at McGill when Boucher got his coaching start.

"He's mellowed a little bit," said Raymond. "I remember when he first started as a head coach, he would call me and we'd have good talks. My job would be to calm him down a little bit because he's very intense." While some have suggested the Canadiens are grooming Boucher to eventually lead the big club, the coach claims he doesn't think that far ahead.

"I try to take in the present, and everything else takes care of itself," he said. "Everybody has those aspirations for me, but it's not something I'm after."

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