

May 9, 2004

STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS

Philadelphia Flyers at Tampa Bay Lightning

An Interview With:

COACH JOHN TORTORELLA

*Q. Real simply, **Game 2**, at home, I know what the **Flyers** think of how important it is, statistically they have got to have it, but how important is it for you to hit the road before you have that game?*

COACH TORTORELLA: I don't look at it that way. I think it's another game. Every game is important in the playoffs. Every game is important, whether it's home or away, 1 through 7, we go about our business as far as every game is important.

*Q. What do you take away from the fact that you won **Game 1**, and the guys who get the headlines didn't get on the score sheet? Do you look at that as, wow, that's a great sign for us, because we got contributions from guys on different lines?*

COACH TORTORELLA: Well, I think in playoffs, as you go through, and now we're in the third round, you need people contributing. You need your offensive people contributing defensively. You need your defensive people, your grinders, your fourth line people, contributing offensively. We've been fortunate so far, but we've got two goals out of our fourth line. Last night's goal was a huge goal. So that's good news.

Am I excited about it? **No**. I think we have a lot of things to work on in our game. I believe we are going to get better. I believe **Philly** is going to get better as we go through this series.

We are just going, we went about our business today, as far as practice. We'll go about our meetings tomorrow and get ready for **Game 2**.

But if you want to succeed in playoffs, you need contributions from people in areas that they usually aren't contributing, to stay involved.

*Q. After last night's game, there was one message from **Philly's** camp, they were all talking about the referees. How can a coach react to see when it's clear that they want referees, they are sending a message to referees, how can you react to this?*

COACH TORTORELLA: I'm not concerned about what's going on in **Philly's** situation, the

rhetoric that goes on there. That's out of our control. We're trying to control our team and how we're going to go about it, our preparation. That's enough for us to handle.

We're going to play. I don't think much about the rhetoric in a series. The series is about the players, it's about a battle, about a huge save. All of that rhetoric and that stuff, we're going to play; that's all we're concerned about here in **Tampa**.

*Q. In the last two series, **Philadelphia** has made some hay by getting in the **D** pretty quickly. Even though you had success yesterday, they seemed to get on you pretty quick, is that something you want to work on to get the moved down quicker?*

COACH TORTORELLA: Well, **Philly** is a good hockey team. Everybody talks about our quickness; they are a pretty quick hockey club, also. They wouldn't be here if they weren't a good forechecking team, that's one of their strengths.

How you stop it, sometimes you just need to try to contain it. Sometimes you need a good first pass to get yourself up. So again, we understand **Philly**. I believe **Philly** understands us. It's a matter of executing some of the things we want to do to get away from some of that pressure.

Q. They were talking about how your defense is almost like five goalies and they have a difficult time getting anything in the middle of the ice, is that something you've gotten better at in the playoffs is keeping that middle area clear?

COACH TORTORELLA: I think the past couple of years, we've played pretty great defense. To be involved in the playoffs, that better be your staple, as far as taking care of the situation in your end zone, especially with **Philly**.

Philly is a quality team in forechecking and bringing pucks to the net. Some good defenseman have put the puck to the net. It's just a matter of putting the time in, and competing defensively. I thought both teams played very well defensively last night.

*Q. Ken **Hitchcock** seemed to work extra hard early in the game to try to get **Primeau** on **Lecavalier**, and you kind of just seemed to allow him to do it, at least some of the time. Is it because you like that match-up also or because you don't care about it?*

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COACH TORTORELLA: Again, I'm not worried about what **Hitch** is going to do. We are going to go about our business with the flow of our team and act accordingly.

Q. *The flow seems to come in these post-season games in the second period for you; has that been a correlation in all three of the series?*

COACH TORTORELLA: I thought yesterday, there was some rust, and we expected that.

I thought as the game went on and towards the second part of the second period, second half and into the third period, I thought we played a little bit better.

Now, why, again, I haven't -- I haven't analyzed -- I haven't gone back to the first and second series as far as understanding the second period. We're just concentrating on what's ahead of us.

But I think especially when you start a series, it takes some time to settle in, and in yesterday's game, I thought one of our biggest strengths in yesterday's game was not getting hurt with some of their surges, first period. I thought their biggest surge came was after we had scored our first goal, when they dominated us for four or five minutes. **But** we didn't get hurt having them scoring two goals. They scored one goal, but they didn't get two and three, as good teams do in surges.

I felt that's where we -- I thought the biggest positive of our team in **Game 1** with an eight-day layoff is being able to settle off and find our game as we went through. I'm not sure if that answers your question, **Paul**.

Q. *Is this the longest or most intense practice, between **Game 1** and **Game 2**, in the post-season? **You** went a while today and you did video today.*

COACH TORTORELLA: No. I think it's uniform for what we did in the prior series. I think as the series goes along, we won't go on the ice. But we've had a number of days off. We made one game, to go out there and skate for 25 minutes won't hurt them. I think the video is the most important thing.

But it's more or less in uniform with our first two series, and as you go through, I think you've got to be careful about overcoaching and you start backing off a little bit because there's going to be a better understanding of each team and some of the adjustments that go through it. **We'll** back off as we have done in the prior series.

Q. *So much has been made about youth and inexperience of this team, but eight wins in a row, can you feel your confidence build with every win? **Do** you see the younger guys, inexperienced guys carrying themselves better with every victory?*

COACH TORTORELLA: I think any athlete feels good about themselves, and I think at this stage in the playoffs, you need to feel good about yourself, as an individual and as a team. I think we have that. I don't think we've crossed over the line of having the wrong type of arrogance. That's something we try to keep in check every day.

That's part of a process for a young team to understand. We've gone through it through the regular season as far as trying to keep it on an even keel. I think it's even the utmost importance through the playoffs. You don't want to overanalyze too many things and you don't want to get too happy about things when things are going right, or you win; or end up losing your mind because you lost a game. You've just got to get ready for the next day. I think our guys understand that or are still in the process of learning.

Q. *You talked about the improvement in your room over the last couple of seasons and how things, when you got here, were not nearly like they are now. The whole idea about not stepping on the crest and respecting the logo, how does that play into it, and **Dave Andreychuk** says you were one of the major offenders early on when monetary fines were being handed out.*

COACH TORTORELLA: He's lying, I'll tell you that right now. **(Laughter)** I stepped on it once; I paid it right away.

I think with such a young core that we have, it comes down to respect. I'll be honest with you, I think the athlete nowadays, not just in our sport, but in the major sports, don't respect the game enough. I think you need to have respect for the game, respect for your teammate, respect for the shirt you're wearing.

When you have that respect, I think that's going to help your game, because then you want to learn. I think it's one of the most important things that we've forgotten about, and I think the athletes have forgotten about. I think it's turned into too much of a business, where I show up to work, do my job for a couple of hours and I'm out of here, I don't even think about it. That's a lack of respect. I think it's wrong.

And I think that's what **David** and the leadership of the room are trying to teach our young core, is that this means something. And

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what you're doing as an athlete means something. It's gone too far to the business side. It's a sport, and you need to respect it if you're going to improve it.

Q. You've acknowledged there was some rust to work through in the first period and a bit of the second, but there didn't seem to be any rust in Khabibulin; how does that not affect him in preparing the same way that everybody else prepares for this series?

COACH TORTORELLA: Well, I think **Reeser** has done a good job with him through the layoff, working on his puck handling, working on a lot of different things with his game. And **Nik** is a focused athlete. I think his preparation through the time off was very good with **Reeser**, and I thought we did a pretty good job in front of him where there wasn't a whole ton of chances. There wasn't a whole ton of chances by either team, it was just one of those games and I think it's going to be a series like that.

But **Nik**, again, looked solid and I think you need to give him credit as far as the way he's been focused and brought his game to a whole different level.

Heck, you've seen him, we've all seen him, he's a world-class goalie, he's playing at that level. I think he just wants to sit in that little area, focused and ride it as long as he can.

Q. Back to the rust a little bit. Did it affect your team more than you thought it would and how much of it was mental or physical or just plain timing in the way you played, and can that be wiped out quick enough to be ready for tomorrow?

COACH TORTORELLA: I think part of it is the **Philadelphia Flyers**. I think they are a pretty good hockey team and I think they can put teams on your heels.

I think another part of it is the timing. We tried to -- you watch the practices, we try to sustain our practices in game situations, do a lot of scrimmaging through it. **But** there's nothing like playing against another guy, another team, another organization; that it just brings in a whole different type of intensity, a whole different type of quickness, so timing was a big part of it.

But again, the key, I thought, our guys just knew it, we had talked about it. And to be honest with you, when we went in thereafter the first period, being at 0-0, we were happy with that. We were concerned about that, but not overly concerned, but we know it was going to happen. So it's a number of things. I think you need to give the **Flyers** a little bit of respect, too, because they

are a good club. No matter if we were playing every other day going into that, they could still do that to a team.

They spent a lot of time in our end zone, but I thought we played very well defensively. We're going to have to be better. We know **Philly** is going to be better tomorrow. We're going to have to be better.

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