

May 24, 2004

2004 Stanley Cup Finals

An Interview With:

COACH DARRYL SUTTER

Q. Explain your thoughts first of all, on the Stanley Cup Final with two teams, a No. 5 seed and then a Tampa Bay Lightning team that has evolved into something that has been pretty special for this area; particularly in the Florida area considering the history of the franchise. And the buildup to this.

COACH SUTTER: First of all, for their team, they are fitting champions, division winner last year, division winner this year, first overall in their conference already two games and they have proven it for three rounds that they are a Playoff team also. So they are fitting representatives. I think our team, you know, to be called a long-shot or a team that wasn't supposed to make the Playoffs, well, you know, there's such a fine line between making and not making the Playoffs other than those high profiled teams that through your regular season you're competing for one or two spots, not eight spots and that was our goal all season and then once you make the Playoffs, then hey, it's cut in half, you can -- it's not about the best players then, it is about the best teams. I think we have proved that. We didn't -- a lot of times a team will advance because somebody else beats somebody else, we beat the top three seeds. So we're fitting champions too over a 10 to two-week period for our team to beat those top three teams is not an indication of anything other than how well we played.

Q. The Calgary Flames are very unknown obviously in these parts in the Tampa Bay area...

COACH SUTTER: Likewise, I am sure.

Q. Basically describe what the makeup of your team is so fans here in Tampa who haven't gotten to see your team play --

COACH SUTTER: I think they are similar to your team. I think it's a team that forechecks, a team with speed, a team that you know, both teams are really good defensive teams but the reason they are good defensive teams is that they are aggressive teams. I think we're similar type teams.

Q. If you look down both lineups there's a higher percentage of Canadians that I can remember making it to the Stanley Cup Final the same year before. Do you make anything out of that?

COACH SUTTER: I think that obviously I am Canadian so you get a little biased, we made a commitment last summer to, you know, when you are in that market, the smaller market, No. 1, you have to identify players that want to play there and that it's really special to play there. I think that was part of our process last summer, but then if you look at it the trades we made during the year, **Kiprusoff**, Nieminen and **Nilson** pretty important players on our team. Two Fins and a Swede. I don't really know how that plays.

Q. You touched on it just a little while ago about two similar teams that can play with speed. Last year we saw New Jersey and Anaheim more of a defensive matchup. Is this a one-shot thing or is it more of a trend towards run-and-gun forechecking a little bit more wide open?

COACH SUTTER: Meaning?

Q. This series, is this the NHL does this kind of represent a little bit more of get back to a run-and-gun style?

COACH SUTTER: I don't think that's the focal point of it. I think that they are -- our teams are both younger teams and a good coach has allowed teams to play with what they have. I think that that's what both these teams have, they have young players that are talented and, you know, there's been so much made of, you know, -- because we have had the days off it's been a lot made about small markets and good for hockey, a Canadian team and all that, but you know what it is, what nobody has talked about, is the reason that these teams have had some success is that they are fun teams, they are exciting teams. And that's what will make the Finals a good series because it will be an exciting series.

Q. Nieminen has a Cup ring from Colorado. He was a nonentity pretty much at Pittsburgh and Chicago. Is he kind of in the right system, right place, right time, what has he brought?

COACH SUTTER: You have to look at, **Nieminen** was traded to Pittsburgh just prior or

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after trading deadline two years ago so he goes right into a situation where they are right out of a Playoff spot and then he signs the free agent in Chicago this summer and they were in a Playoff team. He's a Playoff type player. There's a lot of guys that -- there's a lot of players that are more successful in an environment where it's, kind of a short track environment instead of the long haul. That's why he's successful. I think that he's a high energy guy that -- they like this time of the season.

Q. Have you figured out that his elevator doesn't always go to the top?

COACH SUTTER: Pretty good player for us.

Q. You cautioned off the top against drawing a direct correlation between your previous triumphs in the Playoffs and what might happen in this series but given the fact that you have knocked off 3 higher ranked opponents, do you believe your players have developed a belief that they can overcome any obstacle?

COACH SUTTER: It's not that I believe that they can believe it. Obviously they have proven it. I think it's pretty easy for them to believe that. Our team focuses on what we have to do and if that's good enough, then that's good enough. That's how they approach it, going into the game and that's how they leave it after the game.

Q. You mentioned the similarities between the two teams in the speed and the forecheck, but a lot of people say a difference would be Calgary is more of a physical team while Tampa Bay is a more finesse or skilled team, would you say that's true and the clash that will happen in the series?

COACH SUTTER: I think -- I am not -- anything other than they just finished a 7-game series with Philadelphia who is a contrasting style of game that the two play and they came out on top. If you look at the scoring in the series, I think it's 21 to 19, so they didn't get to this point by being only able to play one way and we didn't get to this point by only being able to play one way.

Q. Tampa Bay did score 9 powerplay goals in that series. How key is that the penalty kill and staying out of the box in this series?

COACH SUTTER: Well, I think it's how we won the last series so I think germane to that is that moves on, carries on.

Q. You mentioned that you go with the talent you have. They have three lines that can come pretty hard. You have beaten teams that can kind of come with the same complexion. Do you intend to match in a forecheck situation line per line?

COACH SUTTER: They have home ice. That's their advantage.

Q. Could you speak of the significance with the Cup now with the possibilities of going back to Canada and Calgary being the so-called now adopted team of Canada. You are not just playing for the folks in Calgary, but do you feel that you are playing --

COACH SUTTER: There was issue made of it last series, but I will -- I will just say this: Doesn't matter where you are from or what country you are from when you get to this point every Canadian, you know, when I was a little boy I played for the Stanley Cup, every time we went out and played. I see guys like **Marcus Nilson** on our team now, what it means to him. He's from Sweden. I see Jordan **Leopold** who is from Minnesota, I see what it means to him. I think we're all extremely proud of where we come from. But at the end of the day we're playing for the jersey. I have talked to a lot of players from other teams, you know, the last four, five days from the Canadian teams and they are all really proud of the fact that there's a Canadian team still playing but at the end of the day that's not -- that's not the driving force behind what you are trying to do. We're trying to finish off a long, long road that we have been on. We have been -- our city has been unbelievable in terms of the support and the dedication and the commitment that they have made to us. We want to repay them first. It's kind of emotional actually.

Q. Can you talk about the impact that **Marcus has had on the team and what?**

COACH SUTTER: Who.

Q. **Marcus Nilson?**

COACH SUTTER: He was a player that be quite honest I had a lot of interest in last summer and just wasn't able to get it done and obviously he's a player that I have liked for a long time and he's a guy that can play two or three positions. I think that, you know, quite honest to see him being named to the World Cup team for Sweden tells you what kind of player he is. He is as good as all around forward as there is in the game just probably doesn't have the recognition

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because he's played in -- he played in Florida 'til the deadline, so he's an important player on our club.

Q. You just got a bit emotional a little while ago. Talk about what this means to you personally after all these years you have been known as a hard working guy as a player, coach, No. 2 the idea of two teams that haven't been here before versus every year it's a Detroit, a Jersey, is this kind of refreshing for everybody around the League?

COACH SUTTER: First of all, I am thrilled for our players, No. 1 because in a small town like that that's so consumed by the game and for them not to have had success, especially seven or eight guys that have been there for a long time to them to finally -- hey, they are recognized as a hard working group, a blue collar group and that's kind of what, you know, go to Alberta that's kind of what Alberta is about and for them to be able to carry that flag right now is pretty special for them. I am thrilled for them and that's first and foremost. When you talked about -- when you talk about Colorado and Jersey and whatever else you brought up there, well that's who you were expecting to be in the Stanley Cup Finals. That's why you bring it up. That's not who we were expecting to be in the Stanley Cup Finals.

Q. Refreshing to have two different teams --

COACH SUTTER: Sure it's refreshing. I mean, hey because I am one of them. I don't know what is refreshing to you. That's what it is about. Two young exciting teams. I think that that's what -- that's what is fun.

Q. Could you talk about Craig Conroy play in the post season what he has meant to carry you on this Cup run?

COACH SUTTER: I think he had a tough regular season. He had a slow start and then he tore his knee up and missed six weeks. Then he came back and he was probably still another two weeks from being 100% so really when you look at it he probably missed three months of hockey so he's fresh and he's energized and he's you know, we rely on those three centermen a lot, **Yelle, Conroy** and Nilson so he's a good player for our team. Obviously there's two or three guys that get a lot of the credit and a lot of the recognition but we didn't get here by not having the solid team concept and if you look at it we have got to this point or we got to be a Playoff team because we went from one of the weakest defensive teams in

the League to the top 3. **Craig Conroy** was a former you know, he was an nominee for Selke in prior years so he knows the game. Those centermen are huge for us in that area. He's a guy that he can keep your team loose and he fits in with other team's speed and he does a really good job for us.

Q. What can you tell us now about Martin Gelin, he scored some big guys?

COACH SUTTER: I think it's similar when you talk about guy like **Nieminen**, those guys a guy like Marty thrives in kind of that close setting. I think he wants that short race sort of thing. He's played a lot of years I think sometimes during the regular season it gets long for him but I think that once-- that's a guy who has played in three different teams' Stanley Cup Finals, so pretty, you know, he's excited about it. You just look at him, he's excited with it again and at this stage of his career to get that opportunity again is pretty special. He's a consummate pro. If he's a young guy watching **Martin Gelin** on the ice and off the ice and everything he does away from the rink, he's one of those guys that you can go around the League and that's a hand-picked pro, perfect pro, somebody for -- somebody to model yourself after.

Q. What lessons do you draw from two teams with modest payrolls making it to the Finals?

COACH SUTTER: You know, it's similar to what I said earlier. We I have learned to spend it wisely. That's all.

Q. Can't afford to make too many mistakes?

COACH SUTTER: You can't make no mistakes. Obviously you come in with some existing contracts, but you know, I think we did 16 or 17 contracts last summer and all with the philosophy that we need a new system going forward. And that's still the belief.

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