



A Special Message

I sent this message to a group of young players that I have been mentoring. Thought you would like to read it because you, your staff and players are all, "Something out of the ordinary" in your own way. Feel free to use it with your players as you see fit. I told them:

I've been fortunate to watch you train and play for a while now. Let's start by saying I'm extremely proud of the way you have handled everything to date.

I've seen you go beyond our regular requirements for training @ our camp and/or I'm aware of your other commitments to training.

The challenge has just begun. I've been witness to you making plays when plays are not there on some nights. I've also seen you make a better play when a simpler play was an option. All great players do this.

The more you train, the more you make plays, the more there is @ stake for you and your career. This is a good thing. Once you do something of this nature, out of the ordinary, the stakes rise. There is a whole lot more @ stake every time you hit the ice. "Doing something out of the ordinary" should be the goal of every player each and every shift.

This is the game of hockey. This is what special players have learned, or will have to learn, to live with every day of their careers when their game goes to another level and they show you that glimpse of excellence. Sidney, Evgeny and Marc-Andre started living this way @ a very young age. Others on the team are about to experience the same thing or have begun the process. Ryan Malone, Ryan Whitney, Kristopher Letang, Colby Armstrong, Maxime Talbot, Jordan Staal, Tyler Kennedy and Erik Christensen are all experiencing this @ the NHL level. Mark Recchi and Gary Roberts have been through it and got better every day since junior hockey.

My wish and advice is to embrace this opportunity created by your talents and the will to exceed others' expectations. Be ready, be smart, be prepared to be better every night you step on the ice. If there is a bump in the road, accept it and put it behind you. All the great ones have the courage, composure and confidence to do that. They expect to make great plays and they expect to win making those plays. They possess the unique skill of validating and anointing themselves regardless of opinions and evaluations of others. They have the charisma to raise the bar in any setting and have great communication skills. You know when they walk in to a room.

I can remember calling Ryan Malone and saying, "Don't ever be satisfied until you are in the upper 5% of the league." I still have that same feeling. I recently told him, "Maybe we should lower that percentage number. Are you up to it?"

We drafted Kelly Miller in 9th round (183 overall) for the New York Rangers in 1982. When Kelly ask me what he can do to get better @ our training camp in the Brainerd Lakes Area, my reply was that simple, "Try to do something out of the ordinary every shift." He lived by that motto, played fifteen (15) years and had the communication skills to be a captain in the NHL. The New York Rangers regret that trade and the Washington Capitals got a player who had the charisma, courage, composure, confidence and character to anoint and validate himself regardless of other opinions and evaluations.

We interviewed him to play for the San Jose Sharks after his stint with the Caps near the end of his career. I asked him what he did to have a solid career in the NHL. His reply was, "I tried to do something out of the ordinary every shift of every game I played."

The more I watch games the more I'm convinced of the importance of players with unique skills to overachieve in those unique skills. They need to be hitting on all cylinders, and sharing the puck when it should be shared, to maximize their team's potential. The plays from the back end are especially important because they start everything. However, I don't know how many times I see some player make a dynamic rush and finish by just throwing the puck in to the slot with no receiver available to catch it.

"Errant passes in the slot are the easiest breakouts in Hockey."

The more I watch hockey, the more I see the outstanding players carrying a puck until they have no where to go with it. If every player switches over to a give and go game; sharing the puck unconditionally, they will have a chance to play @ the highest possible level related to their will and skill. The team usually goes like the better players go.

Everyone is trying to emulate the better players.

Coaches can believe anything they want, but players are just as likely to get better because of the better players as they will because of a coach. They need a mix of both and a healthy dose of both. In one case their sub-conscious mind emulates what they see every day and the other case they learn from their mistakes and dialogue from the coaching staff. The sub-conscious mind will emulate all the good it sees. Each player will get better in each category if every player overachieves in their asset categories.

It all comes down to "believing what we see versus what we hear". We will all retain more of what we see and do than what we hear. Seeing and doing has a bigger impact on retention than hearing.

The best report I've written about any player in my 28 years goes like this: "He passes when he should pass, he shoots when he should shoot and he carries the puck only if he has no other option; all the time looking to give it for one good reason; to get it back." It is human nature to want to handle the puck. The great ones are thinking about who they can give the puck to before it hits their stick. Handling the puck is something that is natural to them and not something they are thinking about as the puck is coming to their stick.

My wish for every team, when I see them @ different times during the season, is to be able to say,

"I like your team a heck of lot more than I did a month ago. They have a team game that is tough to beat and they will all improve because of it."

-ole gringo-

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Happy Holidays to you and your family. All the best during the time of the year we have a lot to be thankful for. Sports are a true test of a person's intangibles. Lifetime relationships are developed over a short period of time because of the dynamics of the sport, demands of the job and the people we have the opportunity to meet through our travels.

The game of hockey is full of people in all capacities who know the value of validating and anointing themselves beyond other's beliefs, words, feelings and evaluations. We learn early on that we control our own destiny and in no way do others validate our worth and success.

We all recognize the need for support systems in every person's life, but it still comes down to each of us just 'getting it done'. Keep supporting each other and the results will be dynamic. We are all part of something much bigger than all of us combined; namely each person's life and career.

All the best fm ole gringo

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