

BEYOND THE BLUE

OFFICIAL ALUMNI NEWS OF THE KITCHENER RANGERS



FALL 2019 EDITION



MIKE VAN RYN

HOW'S IT GONNA GO DOWN?

NOT ONLY WAS THE QUESTION POSED IN LAURA BRANIGAN'S 1982 HIT "GLORIA", BUT IT WAS ALSO BEING ASKED BY EVERY ST. LOUIS BLUES FAN AS THE TEAM BECAME NHL "CELLAR DWELLERS" ON JANUARY 1ST, 2019.

By June 12th, they were more than happy to provide their answer as the resurgent Blues became Stanley Cup champions for the first time in franchise history – while adopting the catchy 80's tune as the team's victory song along the way.

Right in the thick of St. Louis' historic season was former Rangers Head Coach Mike Van Ryn. Hired as an assistant coach in May 2018, Van Ryn had spent three years coaching the Blueshirts between 2013 and 2016; the first two as an assistant and the third as the team's head coach.

Finding his way back to St. Louis after stops in Scottsdale and Tuscon, Arizona (as a Player Development Coach and the AHL Roadrunners Head Coach, respectively), Van Ryn was still trying to recover from what he admitted "was a bit of a draining year".

It started with the Blues firing then-Head Coach Mike Yeo after starting the season with a 7-9-3 record and replacing him with interim Craig Berube. Things were back on an upswing on March 29th when the Blues became the seventh team since the 1967-68 season to qualify for the playoffs after being placed last after January 1st.

Showing a level of perseverance rarely

seen, the team would go on to defeat the Boston Bruins in the seventh game of the Stanley Cup Final. Speaking of those final games from his home in St. Augustine, Florida, Van Ryn recalled their first chance to win the Cup – on home ice no less.

"It was deflating. There was so much pressure on our guys. They wanted to win it for the fans, they all had family members in town ... and we didn't play well," recalled Van Ryn of the eventual loss. When the team got on the plane headed back to Boston for game 7, "it was almost like we were relieved. To go in and bounce-back from game 6 - after that feeling of letting people down - was huge," he said.

From "never having been close to winning in the NHL – ever" to raising the Stanley Cup, Van Ryn saw similarities between the Blues' run and his time with the Rangers.

"Going through that first year I had in Kitchener, when we knew we were going to have a tough year ... I think it helped me prepare for this year; getting through the awful start and just sticking with it," said Van Ryn. "Like we did in Kitchener, we just kept grinding."

While he admitted that it's almost impossible to thank every person who

has helped in his coaching development, Rangers COO & Governor Steve Bienkowski remains at the top of his mind to this day.

"He always talked about how we're there to help mould our young players into men and prepare them to make that jump to the next level. But one thing he always said was he's also there to help develop coaches, and they definitely did that for me, and I'll be forever thankful to the Rangers for giving me that opportunity and furthering my career," he said.

Getting his day with the Cup on August 9th, plans were already in place to hold celebrations in the oldest hotel of the oldest American city (St. Augustine) with the oldest professional sports trophy (the Stanley Cup). "It's a small town, but people got behind us pretty well – and it was an easy team to support," said Van Ryn.

Speaking of the fan support, he can't help but draw another similarity between Kitchener and Missouri's hockey town.

"I tell people all the time that Kitchener and its fan base will rival any team in any sport at any level. Both fan bases never waver, they always love the team, and they have always supported the team. It was amazing to see St. Louis rewarded with a Cup."

BEN FANELLI

LOOKING TO “CHANGE THE NARRATIVE” WITH PODCAST ENDEAVOUR

HOCKEY FANS HAVE COME TO KNOW BEN FANELLI'S STORY. A SEVERE BRAIN INJURY SUSTAINED IN 2009 AT 16 YEARS OF AGE AND JUST SEVEN GAMES INTO HIS OHL CAREER WITH THE KITCHENER RANGERS FOLLOWED BY AN UNBELIEVABLE RETURN TO THE RANGERS LINEUP TWO YEARS LATER.

BUT NOW FANELLI IS “LOOKING TO FIND A WAY TO HELP PEOPLE, MOTIVATE, AND INSPIRE” THROUGH HIS WEEKLY PODCAST HEROIC MINDS.



Having launched the podcast just over a year ago, Fanelli admits that the project has evolved as much as he has. “I had no plans for this podcast and I just finished speaking to 6,000 first-year students at the University of Waterloo,” he reflected recently about the impact his conversations have started to have. “It’s been a whirlwind, that’s for sure.”

Currently in his fourth season as Associate Head Coach of the University of Waterloo Warriors men’s hockey team, Fanelli summarized how he “just started having conversations with people. Now it’s evolved to more than just the individual stories of tragedy and resilience to people doing heroic things,” he said.

With more than 74 episodes with 77 different guests in the books, Fanelli is noticing that listeners have an appetite for the type of discussions he has fostered. Further proof lies in the fact that Heroic Minds sees an average play rate of 2,000 per episode and 5,000 overall plays each month.

The Oakville, ON native admitted that “the day of chasing those numbers are behind me though. If they grow because I’m doing something right and people are sharing it, then great. But it’s not the only reason for doing this,” he said. The impetus is based on the notion that “when we talk to people about challenges that exist, the more likely we are to forgive, find a way through difficulties and live without that burden on our shoulders.”

Editing, producing, and interviewing guests all on his own, Fanelli’s goal is to release a new episode each week. “Recognizing the importance of having these conversations has encouraged me to have more of them,” he said, adding how “the value in the conversations I’m having now in learning how other people live, feel, and think in certain situations have made me a thousand-times better person

than I was.” He believes that his podcast can have a trickle-down effect on his audience, thereby making the world a little bit better, one listener at a time.

“THE MORE WE TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT CHALLENGES THAT EXIST, THE MORE LIKELY WE ARE TO FORGIVE, FIND A WAY THROUGH AND LIVE WITHOUT THAT BURDEN ON OUR SHOULDERS,” HE EXPLAINED.

Hopeful to secure future guests like a fighter pilot, a Sherpa, or a crisis negotiator, Fanelli really wants “to know how they approach life. All these stories continue to boggle my mind. To say that a person with more Twitter followers would have a better story ... is not necessarily the case.”

And while he has gained notoriety for his hockey playing days with the Rangers, he’s more than content shining the spotlight on others now. “My time with the Rangers helped me build, and earn, respect today,” he said, crediting the leadership opportunities and experience provided for his personal growth.

“Back in the day, if I noticed someone who looked or acted differently, I would’ve supported them in every way - but I don’t think I would have asked questions about how their life is,” said Fanelli.

The former Rangers captain believes the discussions he’s having is making a similar impact on the lives of others too. While he’s been fortunate to have a lot of narratives presented to him, he hopes that the podcast continues to grow. “I hope the opportunities continue to come. I’ve been lucky enough that they’ve found me so far. It’s been really cool and humbling,” he said.

“I guess we’ll see where we can take this thing.”



MAKING THOSE BROTHERHOOD CONNECTIONS IS THE BIGGEST MEMORY, IN GENERAL, THAT I'VE TAKEN AWAY FROM THE RANGERS EXPERIENCE.

-GENTLES

HITTING THE ICE AND THE BOOKS WITH THE HAWKS

As a defenceman, Kyle Gentles has been trained to protect his goaltender in a myriad of ways. Sitting at his desk recently, inside a house he's renting with a handful of fellow first-year student-athletes, he's studying how to defend the public at large.



"I've always wanted to pursue studies in law – whether it's policing or eventually going to law school, but this area of study is where my passion is" Gentles said. He is beginning his first semester at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, ON – as well as his inaugural season with the Golden Hawks varsity hockey team.

Currently in the Bachelor of Arts stream but minoring in Criminology, Gentles speaks with genuine excitement describing how he's "learning a lot about Indigenous Studies and Psychology" too. Away from the classroom, he's had discussions with Waterloo Regional Police about potential job opportunities after graduation. "I have a long-term goal but, right now, it's more of a feeling-out process," he said of his eventual career path.

A native of Ajax, ON, Gentles appeared in 174 games with the Rangers from 2016-2019 and recorded 32 points in that span. As an over-ager last year, he had his best offensive season notching 13 assists.

He was also a plus five in 54 regular season games despite being out of action for seven weeks early in the year due to a leg injury. With no lingering issues in his limb, Gentles was named as part of Head Coach (and fellow Rangers alum) Greg "Chief" Puhalski's eight-player recruiting class in August.

The transition to Ontario University Athletics from the OHL has been a smooth one thanks in extra part to former teammate Jake Henderson. Henderson had 15 points in 27 regular season games during his one season with the Hawks last year before joining the Kansas City Mavericks of the East Coast Hockey League. He recently signed with the Rapid City Rush for the 2019/20 season. "Henderson told me what to expect with school, hockey, and the coaches," said Gentles, adding,

"Lucky for me, a lot of the returning players liked him, so when I brought his name up and our connection, there were some nice smiles on their faces," he said with a laugh.

Providing his assessment thus far, Gentles admitted that "I'm playing against guys that are much older, much stronger, and have a good sense of what university hockey is all about. "These guys take their hockey very seriously, but they also look to add the fun aspect to it – which I love." "Once we get on the ice though, Chief is on top of us. He wants his drills done correctly," he said of the team's bench boss, who is entering his 10th season leading the purple and gold. "At the end of the day, hockey's still hockey ... The adjustment hasn't been that hard."

As he forges his path in life, Gentles fondly recalls the Rangers' run to the Western Conference finals two seasons ago. "The atmosphere at The Aud was amazing and then flying-out after the game to Sault Ste. Marie and playing in front of their crowd, the talented players we had, that was definitely a huge honour," he said.

Gentles values the friendships developed the most though. "I look at my time in Kitchener as a time of growth but not just in the hockey aspect. I now have long-term friends that I connect with every single day," he said. "Making those brotherhood connections is the biggest memory, in general, that I've taken away from the Rangers experience."

CATCH UP WITH CONNOR HALL



BY CONNOR HALL'S OWN ASSESSMENT, THE GAME OF HOCKEY CONTINUES TO CHANGE A LOT.

"There's no need for the big bruiser anymore," said the gritty 6'2" defenceman from Cambridge, ON. It would seem somewhat ironic then that he spent a lot of time in the boxing ring this past summer dropping 30 pounds for his best shot of earning an invite to NHL camp.

Stepping into the squared-circle with the former world #1-ranked super middleweight champion Syd "The Jewel" Vanderpool twice a week was about learning the quickness of the sport. "Syd taught me a lot about the work ethic side of training," said Hall. "Just learning bits and pieces from him helped a lot."

It's certainly been a career evolution for the recently-graduated Rangers player, who accumulated 174 PIM in 115 regular season games with the team. Injuring his left shoulder first in the 2016-2017 season (a year after he was taken in the third round of the NHL Draft by the Pittsburgh Penguins), he then hurt his other shoulder during the playoffs the following season. Both times, he needed to go under the knife for repairs that ultimately didn't heal as hoped. The final procedure on his left shoulder occurred in early January 2019.

Since the end of May through August, Rangers Director of Sports Science and Development Coach Brandon Merli "has done a great job getting me stronger" said Hall. Merli began by working Hall's shoulder hard enough in order to get it into perfect shape.

"This is the first time I can say I'm going to a camp in unreal shape and with a fully healthy body that actually gives me a chance to sign a professional contract and play professional hockey," he

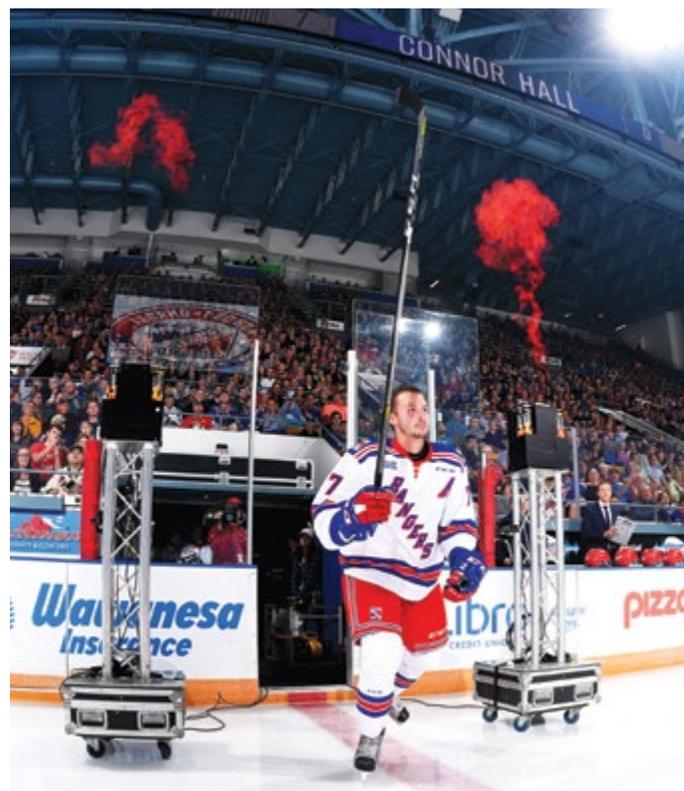
said from Arizona rookie camp. Despite things not working out with the Coyotes, another opportunity has presented itself at the AHL's Rochester Americans training camp in late-September.

That's all Hall wants - a legitimate shot to prove what he can do when he's 100% healthy. "Under the circumstances, signing any type of contract that would allow me to play pro and help get my feet wet would be great," he said.

Despite his most recent opportunity to keep playing the game he loves at a high level, Hall conceded to "feeling nerves at the end of last season. I didn't get a camp invite the year before and then I didn't play the full season - so I thought this might've been the end," said the Kitchener fan favourite.

"It's been really hard. I've had a lot of long summers (of recovery) compared to everyone else - which can be both a good and bad thing. But I just stayed focused and driven."

Reflecting on the only OHL team he's played for, Hall was quick to share that it's been "a great four years in Kitchener and been fun to learn from the coaching staff, because they can all say that they've been through it too."



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Send an e-mail to Dan Polischuk at dpolishuk@kitchenerangers.com for your invitation and start connecting with long-lost friends and teammates now!



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