

## ***ANDERSON ANGLE: LOADED TEAMS HURTING THE XHL***

It's August again: the time when XHL championship are won and lost. The trouble is, it's late August after the final face-off has been dropped, not early August when the actual playoffs are played. In the the big league of sports, it would be like seeing the World Series winner decided in November, the NFL champion crowned in February, or the Stanley Cup awarded in July.

It's long been a plague of the XHL to see one or two powerhouse teams dominate the league year in and year out. The problem is there is really no way to control the situation either, unless you mandate free agency rules or make teams draft players. Then you run the risk of losing players and teams.

I know the argument: we just want to play with our friends. But the truth is, no matter how you spin it, winning attracts winners. Most people want to be winners, even if it's only a plastic trophy. The good players tend to flock to the good teams, leaving the bottom teams even farther behind.

The Maniax have won three titles in a row and have really dominated the league during that three year span, losing on a handful of games in that time span. I'm certainly not trying to take anything away from them. I have a ton of respect for each of them as hockey players. It was great to see Zach Smith win a Cup and to see Rob Stanley continue to dominate defensively to this day. The Maniax are tremendously skilled and they work like a fine oiled machine. That takes time and chemistry.

But we've got to be real here too. There was zero surprise, at least from this guy, when they won their third Taylor Memorial Cup by beating the Wolfpack 12-3 in game two of the championship this year. If you glanced over the score, look again. That's a nine goal differential in the championship game. And that is in no way meant to be an embarrassment to the Wolfpack. They were a fine team and they played their hearts out in the playoffs (I know cause they beat us). If the Wolfpack lost by nine goals in the championship game, what is that saying about the league?

The problem, as I see it, is that when you have one top team in the league, it not only weeds out the talent pool for the rest of the team, it causes a reciprocal effect for other teams to try to load up just to have a chance to compete.

We're already seeing that happen in preparation for 2012. I woke up to a text today from none other than the Berta, the Voodoo's "retiring" Captain (had to get a shot in there). The text said

that Berta would be back for another season, which is great, and that the Voodoo will be back for another season. But as good as the Voodoo were last year, they know they have to be even better because they have to win a championship. And that means you have to have a roster better than the Maniax.

I put on my investigative hat and “forced” Berta to turn over the names of his new roster for the 2012 season. I won’t share it at this time because I don’t want to steal the next Berta Factor’s thunder, but I can tell you there is a ton of firepower, even more so than last year’s Voodoo team.

Here’s a small hint though. Two players from different playoff teams from the 2011 season will be a part of the 2012 Voodoo team. And each of these players will leave gaping holes in their previous team’s rosters, and could lead one or both teams to fold.

Please don’t get me wrong. I’m not writing this to offend, scold, or demean anybody or any team. To borrow a line from the professional sports world: “it’s just business.” It’s a classic case of the rich teams getting richer and the poor teams getting poorer.

Just imagine how competitive and interesting the league could be next year if each team tried to balance their rosters so that they were roughly on the same playing level. Imagine a world where a six seed had a chance to win the title.

I’ve come to realize that barring a situation where my team, the Colonials, somehow play completely over our heads that I won’t be raising another Cup in the XHL. And as much as I don’t like losing, I’m ok with this for some reason. I wouldn’t want to abandon my teammates to join the Wolfpack and help them load up (not that there was ever an offer) or round out the Voodoo roster (there was an offer).

As much as I love the XHL, I look forward to the winter league now because there will be a draft and every team will have a chance to compete. In the meantime, I’ll still look forward to the XHL season, even though I know the rosters will be much different. The XHL’s “system” rivals that of Major League Baseball’s salary cap-less system where there are teams like the Yankees and Red Sox who can outspend the Pirates three, four, or five times over. I suppose I shouldn’t take it to heart though. After all, it’s just business.