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## Scotty Bowman and the Detroit Redwings

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

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Most of the focus on sport in the United States over the last week has been on the achievements of Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls as they won their sixth NBA championship in eight years, their third consecutively. The discussion of this dynasty has been extensive, comparing it to the great Laker and Celtic teams of the past. Michael has emerged as an even larger figure both off and on the court with Fortune Magazine dubbing him the ten billion dollar man.

The focus then turned to the future of Michael Jordan and the future of the Bulls. Have we seen the last of MJ in a Bulls uniform or in any uniform? Will the Bulls be held together for one more run at the championship, or is it time to dismantle this team and rebuild a new one? What of Scottie Pippen and Phil Jackson? And now we know whither Phil Jackson.

All of these are, no doubt, important and interesting questions, but did anyone notice that something else has been going on in the National Hockey League that may be as significant and as historic? The Detroit Red Wings just won their second consecutive Stanley Cup with a second consecutive sweep in the cup final, and Scotty Bowman has quietly become one of the great coaches in the history of professional sport in North America. When the names of the great coaches like Lombardi, Auerbach, McCarthy and Blake are cited, the name of Scotty Bowman must now be there with them.

The Red Wings saw their championship of a year ago cast in a dark shadow after only six days by the limousine accident that left Vladimir Konstantinov in a wheel chair and the team masseur, Sergei Mnatsakonov, seriously injured. To see Konstantinov sharing in this playoff run and taking part in the traditional skating of cup was an inspiration for everyone, and should have been an object lesson as well.

The Wings have emerged as a formidable force in the NHL in the nineties under the leadership of Scotty Bowman. What Bowman has done is blend a marvelously talented group of Russian, American, Canadian and other European players into a team that reflects the concentration and dedication of Scotty Bowman. It is a relatively young team that may, in fact, dominate the late nineties to an even greater extent than it dominated the middle of the decade.

In the late eighties and early nineties the Red Wings seemed to play very good regular season hockey, only to depart early in the playoffs to what often appeared to be teams of lesser talent. After experiencing that same pattern in his first year in Detroit, Bowman took the Wings to the Stanley Cup finals in 1995. In his first three seasons in Detroit Bowman's teams finished first in the regular season but did not win a cup. Then in his fourth season they finished fifth, made the playoffs, and won the Stanley Cup. This year Detroit finished second before heading into the playoffs.

In the last two seasons the Wings have won 32 and lost only 10 playoff games, while sweeping both finals. Scotty Bowman has been the mastermind, the master craftsman, and the master manipulator of this superb hockey club. In the process he has entered the NHL record books.

For twenty-six seasons over a thirty year period Scotty Bowman has been the head coach of an NHL team. He was trained in Montreal by the great Toe Blake before he joined the St. Louis Blues as head coach in 1967. In his first three years there he took the Blues to the Stanley Cup finals where they lost. In 1971 he was tapped to go back to Montreal as head coach.

In the Canadian hockey capital Bowman's teams won five Stanley Cups, including the impressive four in a row from 1976 to '79. The Canadians were a combined 60-15 in the playoffs, and two of those teams won over 80% of their regular season games. Another Cup was added to the coaching resume in Pittsburgh, where Bowman also picked up a Stanley Cup as GM.

Along the way Bowman was developing a well-deserved reputation as master tactician and psychologist with the personality of Simon Legree, if he were even conceded to have a personality. He could be brutal to his players both in print and in front of one another. He could also be distant and non-communicative. Through it all his teams won, and his players played with intensity and focus every minute they were on the ice. If they did not, they did not go back onto the ice. No one knows more about the game, prepares his players any better, or is better prepared himself than Bowman. Like most great coaches Scotty Bowman is a driven personality.

Many coaches say they demand total commitment from their players and from themselves, but not all that many really do. Bowman both got it and gave it, and still does. If he has changed in

the later years of his career in Detroit, it may be seen in occasional signs that he is human. His comments at the public celebration in Detroit were filled with emotion, and his pride in the players was obvious.

Last week Scotty Bowman tied the record held by his mentor Toe Blake by winning his eighth Stanley Cup as a coach. In the finals Bowman is 32-5, while Blake was 32-10. At age sixty-four he seems uncertain about his future. Whether or not he comes back for a run at a ninth cup and third in row in Detroit, his legacy is secure.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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