

BURNETT GETS ANOTHER CRACK AT MEMORIAL CUP

FORMER GENERALS COACH GUIDES GUELPH STORM TO REMARKABLE OHL TITLE

BRIAN MCNAIR
bmcnair@durhamregion.com

GUELPH - Twenty-one years after missing out on a Memorial Cup championship by the slimmest of margins, George Burnett will get another crack at it with the Guelph Storm.

In his second season of his second stint in Guelph, the 57-year-old Port Perry native has guided the team through an incredible play-off run in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), culminating in a six-game win over the favoured Ottawa 67's and the Storm's fourth J. Ross Robertson Cup.

Burnett, the team's coach and general manager, will now get the opportunity to ease the memory of the 1998 Memorial Cup final - a 4-3 overtime loss to the Portland Winterhawks - when the 2019 tournament plays out May 17-26 in Halifax.

"That seems like an eternity ago, but it was a different team and the game is different now; the league is different," Burnett pointed out in a telephone interview. "There are so many things that have changed in that time."

The Storm will go into the tournament with the proven ability of winning when the stakes are the highest, having survived seven elimination games en route to the OHL title.

Burnett went all-in leading up to the trade deadline, acquiring six key players in January alone for three players and a



Port Perry native George Burnett is head coach and general manager of the OHL champion Guelph Storm.

Photo by Terry Wilson/OHL Images

whopping 19 draft picks, including eight each in the second and third rounds.

Among those who came in were Canadian world junior team members Nick Suzuki, who racked up 42 points in 24 playoff games; MacKenzie Entwistle, who won an OHL title with Hamilton last year; and defenceman Markus Phillips, who like Burnett hails from Port Perry.

Despite a stacked roster that includes 11 NHL draft picks, however, the Storm's season seemed destined for a premature end when they fell behind 3-0 in the second

round against the London Knights, including a 7-0 whitewash in Game 2.

Showing no quit, the Storm fought back to win the next four games, before downing the Saginaw Spirit in another seven-game thriller in the conference final and the league-leading 67's in the league final.

"Getting behind is not a whole lot of fun, trust me, but the guys have stayed calm, and when I've got a little bit too excited, they've settled me down too," Burnett explained. "They've handled the seven elimination games with great poise

and patience, and for whatever reason we've gotten through it and we're looking forward to the next challenge starting Saturday."

Burnett has seen and done plenty since taking over as head coach of the Niagara Falls Thunder early in the 1989-90 season, hired by Oshawa businessman Rick Gay at age 27 to replace Bill LaForge.

After winning the OHL coach of the year award two straight years with the Thunder and leading the Cape Breton Oilers to an American Hockey League

title in 1993, Burnett was hired as head coach of the Edmonton Oilers in 1994, but fired after a 12-20-3 start to the season.

He has spent most of the rest of his career as coach/GM in the OHL, including four years with the Oshawa Generals, and made one other trip to the Memorial Cup - with the Belleville Bulls in 2008, when they finished third after a 9-0 semifinal loss to the host Kitchener Rangers.

Burnett, who lives in Brooklin with his wife in the off-season, made the move from Belleville to Hamilton when the franchise relocated in 2015, but lasted only one season before being let go.

He was appointed by the OHL as GM of the Flint Firebirds in 2016, and helped stabilize the franchise before leaving to rejoin the Storm the following season.

"I hope I've changed with the times a little bit and adjusted to the way the kids are these days... There are a lot of things that have changed, but it's still fun to go to the rink most every day," he explained. "We are fortunate to have the opportunities that we have, and it's fun when things come together like this season has."

OPINION

TEAM MINDSET IS CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS

COLUMNIST DOUG SMITH SAYS STRONG BELIEF IN WINNING SEPARATES THE BEST



DR DOUGLAS SMITH
Column

The teams with the greatest athletes and skill levels are not always the ones who come out on top when it counts.

Developing a positive and creative team mindset in my research and opinion is the key to winning major

championships such as the Stanley Cup, World Series, Super Bowl, NBA, World Cup and Olympic team championships.

Let's take the NHL playoffs this year.

Tampa undoubtedly had the best team this year. Almost everyone predicted Tampa would easily win the cup and handily defeat Columbus. Columbus worked very hard to get into the playoffs. They were

clearly the underdogs. However, Columbus knew they would have to work some magic to beat the best team in the league.

Most people would agree that there are no superstars on Columbus like Tampa has. So skill and talent did not play a deciding factor in the outcome. The results could only come from the creative and positive team mindset Columbus developed over the past year.

John Tortorella, Columbus's famous coach who won the Stanley Cup with

Tampa in 2004, likes to remind his team to believe that their mindset is what separates them from the pack and that it's a mindset of believing they can win that does the job best.

It's amazing what can happen when you stand in there and refuse to take a back seat to any team, he told his players. Moreover, he told the team to "Forget about skills. Forget about X's and O's." Focus on believing in themselves.

That Columbus mindset allowed them to defeat Tampa, the best team in the

NHL by a long shot.

I predict that the team that wins the NHL playoffs this year will be the one with the best team chemistry and mindset and not the expected favourite.

Did you know that 26 of 30 Major League Baseball teams have a sports psychologist on their team to help coaches and athletes deal with the pressure, stress, injuries, personal issues, losses, team chemistry and to keep the communication lines back and forth flowing smoothly?

Think of all the winningest team champions in the world, such as the Montreal Canadiens, the New England Patriots. Did they be-

lieve they were the best? Did they have the best team chemistry and have great respect for each other, the coaches and management?

I believe the answer is yes to both questions.

Cultivating a smart, creative and magical mindset to deal with the pressure-packed and fierce competition today necessitates a new and innovative approach to win championships.

Dr. Douglas Smith is a licensed psychologist in Ontario, specializing in sport psychology since 1985. Contact him at 905-430-3538 or drdoug@promind.ca; website www.promind.ca.