

Saturday 10 October

Since we had had two consecutive early mornings due to commuting or a hockey game, the kids were given a sleep-in up to 9:30am. The rest was much welcomed. Breakfast was served, the kids sorted their clothes and hockey gear, and we proceeded to do some light activity to kill time and do some last minute errands. We went to the local Marion Westfield Mall, where they shopped and ate lunch up to 1:30pm.

Back at the hotel, the kids prepared for the coming match. This was the final one of the tour, and many were aware of the importance of this one. This was to be Elaine Clarke's final match as team manager, as well as Jonathan Albright's last game as the head coach. Both have been involved with the Under-16 programme since 2004, and everyone wanted them to finish their careers with the programme with a win.

We arrived at the rink an hour before the game. The team went through their usual pre-game warm-up, and then entered the dressingroom with silence but also a reserved confidence. Not many words were said before the game- the players already knew. This was a game we were not going to lose.

Reuben Burgess performed a proud Haka, and the South Australians finally responded by respectfully advancing up to the red line. It was a brilliant challenge, and fantastic response. The start of the game however, was a resumption of the previous match. New Zealand dominated the possession, and maintained pressure on the South Australian defences. With about 10 minutes into the period, George Coslett took the puck at the blue line, and rifled a shot just under the crossbar. 1-0 New Zealand. A few minutes later, on a nifty set-up by Frazer Ellis and Callum Jansson, Shaun Harrison drove the puck into the South Australian net. 2-0 for New Zealand.

New Zealand mounted constant pressure in the second period. Liam Dallimore had a few chances in a yawning net to bury the puck, but it managed to just go wide or skip over his stick. We continuously wore down their defences, and pinned them deep into their zone. Although they had a few chances, their shots were limited to the high slot or outside fringes. Also of note, their goaltender played an outstanding game, limiting the damage to just two goals against.

The remainder of the game saw New Zealand keep the pressure on, and limiting the South Australians to just 12 shots in the game. The final score ended at 2-0, and the Kiwis piled in celebration onto goaltender Csaba Kersco-Magos. The bench was euphoric, and Elaine had tears in her eyes. She has ended her Under-16 managerial career on a winning note.

After the match, the team was in celebration mode. Water bottles were sprayed all over the players and assistant coach Andy Hay, and then back at the hotel the team dunked captain George Coslett into the pool (the rest of the team followed a few seconds later!). Once the energy had been spent, the team assembled for the final team dinner, where the NZIHF pennants and awards were distributed. Elaine announced her retirement from

National Team hockey, and I announced my resignation as coach of the Under-16 National Team. The night was ended with a message I gave to the team, by reciting the words that are etched on the walls of the historic dressingroom of the Montreal Canadiens hockey club:

“To you, from failing hands, we throw the torch. Be yours to hold it high.”

Reported by Jonathan Albright
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