

## 2009-2010 Season Review

by Peter Diamantakos

Following a year where the dynamics of the SCHL changed forever (due to the removal of Money Men), the 2009-2010 season kicked off by steering away from boardroom matters (change of ownership, rules put in place to curb tanking) and focusing strictly on hockey matters. As such, the league saw three significant deals during the summer: 1. The Jawas, fresh off their first ever playoff victory, peddled veteran Daniel Alfredsson to the Triads for relative unknown (at the time) Keith Yandle; 2. The Millionaires focused on the now by trading the 4<sup>th</sup> overall pick (Evander Kane) to the Devils for up-and-coming Devin Setoguchi (who went on to have a sub-par season); and 3. The usually timid and reserved Spartans forewent a large portion of the future to acquire Marc Savard (who missed exactly half of the season) from the perpetual middle-of-the-pack Brahmas.

If there is anything the 2009-2010 will be remembered mostly for, it will be the significant amount of injuries. Some of the league's best such as Ovechkin, Spezza, Hensky, D. Sedin, Savard, Elias, Gonchar, Markov and Ward all missed a significant portion of the season due to injury. In fact, the situation got so bad that: the Tycoons missed a few key components in their title defenses; the Shrubdogs played over three quarters of the season without a goalie and barely scraped over the 700 man game threshold; and, the Spartans at one point were only dressing 6 forwards and 1 d-man as half their team was ravaged by injury.

The regular season continued to see more of the same among the league's elite as well as a few significant feats. The Tycoons, despite their injury woes, rattled off a second consecutive 19-2 season, an unbelievable (unparalleled?) accomplishment, to grab another Premier division crown and Prime Minister award. The Kilts, found unfamiliarly in the Gold division, decided one year was one too many and captured the division crown by barely staving off the Gryphons, who seem to be unable one way or another to get over the final hump to elitism. The Goldminers continued their ascent towards the league's top by winning their first ever division title and now find themselves in the Gold division after two promotions within their young four-year existence. Over in the Bronze, the Express officially took the league by storm despite their 14<sup>th</sup> WG place finish by garnering one of the most consistent seasons that led to their winning of the division title and a bye into the playoffs – an incredible job done in a short period of time of what was a clear sad-sack franchise. Furthermore, the Regime, coming off their dubious 0-fer season, finally won a match (three in total), with the Heartbreakers holding the distinction of failing to carry on “the streak”. Elsewhere, the Millionaires turned into one of the better teams following a year where they were one of the worst (thanks primarily to Ilya Bryzgalov), and on the opposite end of the spectrum, the 79ers failed to make the playoffs despite being led by super-trio Crosby, Thornton and Lundqvist (how is that even possible?!).

The playoffs started off with the Tycoons, Jawas, Express and Bullets all earning a bye to the quarter-finals. The first round saw no upsets as the Flash easily handled a worn-down Triads team, the Vanguard barely squeaked by the Kilts thanks to a Kessel-Phaneuf scoring play with mere minutes left in the Leafs' Saturday nighter (the Kilts would have gone on to win the championship had it not been for

that play), the Gryphons disposing of the Goldminers with relative ease, and the Barracudas edging out the Bryzgalov-led Millionaires despite essentially playing without a goalie of their own.

The week off for the aforementioned bye teams proved to be useful as they each won their quarter-finals matchups against the Vanguard, Barracudas, Gryphons and Flash, respectively. The only close matchup was the Jawas versus the Barracudas which ended in a tie, with the Jawas moving on thanks to their 23-22 nail-biter over the 'cudas in Week 2. As such, it was fitting that the top four teams met in the semis. The two previous Snipers Cup champs squared off in one matchup while the Cinderella-story Express team pitted against the long-time coming Jawas to round out the other Frozen Four matchup. In the end, neither ended up being a battle for the ages as the Bullets knocked off the defending champs with a 25-17 victory and the clock finally struck midnight for the Express due to a 24-17 Jawas victory.

The finals ended up being the battle of two legendary SCHL teams – the Bullets and Jawas – in what was dubbed the “Battle of the Duos”. Toews and Kane vs. Hank and Dank Sedin. Doesn't get much better than that! This was familiar territory for the Bullets having captured the crown two years prior. On the other hand, the Jawas, after years of building one of the deepest cores, finally got to the point that's been eluding them so long yet was inevitable. In what was a see-saw battle throughout, the determining of the 2009-2010 champions came down to the last night. One crucial matchup everyone's eyes were on was Pittsburgh versus Washington. As was the case earlier in the matchup, the Jawas were without their best player (Malkin) and came at a time where they needed him the most (upon hearing the news he wasn't playing, Jawas GM MacKinnon quipped, “Malkin is dead to me!”). Luckily for them, M-A Fleury played the part of a sieve and was yanked early – no need to worry about a goalie win. A second matchup that was of primary focus was the Bullets' duos' Blackhawks versus the Stars. Unlike the flaky Russian Malkin, Toews and Kane delivered for a combined three points (fittingly enough, it's what ended up winning them the championship). It all came down to the Jawas' duo (actually, trio when you factor in Burrows) in their matchup – Vancouver versus Colorado. The trio did not disappoint having compiled four points. However, what will go down in SCHL infamy will be the scoring play late in the game in which each of the trio were in on that missed the net!!! A collective heart attack for everyone associated with the Jawas as that would have given them the SCHL crown having held the tiebreaker. Such a play did not come again and the Jawas will forever be haunted by that defining moment.

The “Battle of the Duos” lived up to the hype and did not disappoint. The Bullet[s] (eerily resembling a hard stiffer) “rose” to the occasion once again to capture their second Snipers Cup championship in three years and became only the third repeat winner.

P.S. And in other news, the Tycoons won their third consecutive WG title – ho-hum.