

Interview with the

DUCS D'ANGERS

Thursday, 26th January

On Thursday, 26th January, we had the opportunity to meet with Evan Cowley, Brendan Harms, Matt Prapavassis, hockey players for Les Ducs d'Angers, and their coach Jason O'Leary. For two hours, they were interviewed on the subject of unity and diversity in hockey.

The importance of team spirit

The players were first asked about the importance of having a strong team spirit. They started by mentioning that choosing to play in France (instead of in Canada or the US) allowed them to have more opportunities and to discover other teams, cultures and atmospheres. They noted some differences between hockey in their home country and hockey in France. For example, they revealed that Europeans sing, dance and create a lively ambiance.

It is quite the opposite for American and Canadian spectators, who tend to leave the stadium before the end of the game to go to their cars and avoid traffic jams.

The players were then questioned on team spirit during games. They explained that despite some rivalry, they can be friends with the opposite team. However, once on the ice, there is no friendship anymore.

Having a strong team spirit within your team is also hugely important. The players remarked that the team was like a second family, as they spend more time with their teammates than with their own family. A good relationship is essential as it benefits the results of the team.

It can also serve as emotional support, considering the fact that players often do not have their family living with them. Players explained that they shared activities with each other, such as going to the cinema or to SCO games. They also added that their children, their wives or girlfriends were friends as well.



The players stated that it was always a pleasure to meet and talk with fans, especially when they spoke English. But the interactions can be less agreeable sometimes, if supporters have hurtful comments or if players wish to be left alone.

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Fighting on the ice

The players and Jason O'Leary were then asked questions on diversity and discrimination in hockey. Jason O'Leary observed that there is a lot of discussions around a greater inclusivity in hockey. They are trying to encourage people to play this sport, even if it is an expensive one due to the cost of the required equipment. On the subject of discrimination, the coach said that a player once refused to play because another one was wearing a jersey with a LGBTQ+ rainbow on it. Players contested this move as it prevented everyone from being included in a team.



Jason O'Leary,
head coach

Jason O'Leary then confided that he observed an example of racism when he was coaching in Switzerland. During a game, supporters threw bananas at the coach of the opposite team. This person was black and deaf. The Ducs' coach was extremely saddened by the event, and publicly took a stand against the supporters in question. He was then criticized for having defended a member of an adverse team.

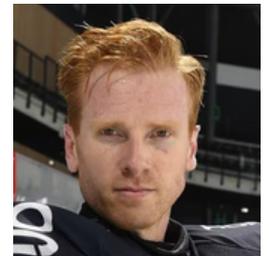


Matt Prapavessis,
Defense

Jason O'Leary also mentioned that he has suffered from discrimination. According to him, people don't do it on purpose and most of the time, it was because he wasn't from the country he coached. He added that once people criticizing him learnt to know him, they would stop.

On the question of defending a particular cause, Matt Prapavessis stated that, like his coach, he wished to make hockey more inclusive: for low-budget families, every gender and every origin.

For Evan Cowley, there are no discrimination or conflicts within the Ducs team. Relations between teammates are excellent, despite being from different nationalities. They form a close-knit group with a strong team spirit. They all trust each other and if something happens, his team will stick together to solve the issue. Cowley reaffirmed that there were only good people within the Ducs players and staff.



Evan Cowley,
Goal keeper

Indeed, being respectful and responsible is key in hockey. The goalie explained that if you are a good person and a good player, the coach will choose you. However, if you are a good player but a jerk, nobody will want you in their team. Jason O'Leary added that when selecting players, he studied what each one could bring to the team.



The players and Jason O'Leary were then asked what events shaped the history of hockey in their opinion. For the coach, it was when the Soviet bloc disappeared and Russians players joined North American teams. Evans noted that the most memorable event for him was the final of the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, when Canada defeated the United States in hockey, his home country.

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Inspiring future players

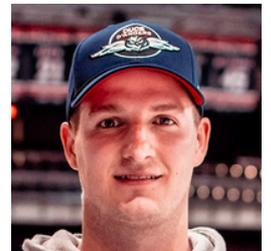
The Ducs players were finally questioned on the subject of inspiring the future generation. They first explained what was the Hall of Fame. Located in Toronto, the Hall of Fame is an important piece of sport culture. It honours three types of people: players, builders (coaches, managers, etc.) and on-ice officials (referees). Although it is a hockey institution, it isn't an ambition for any of the players interviewed. One of them stated "I mean, it's a dream when you are 5 years old, but it's not my goal today".



The players were also asked about enormous posters or jerseys hung above the ice rink. They explained that they commemorated important players from the club. Once the number is displayed over the arena, it becomes "retired", which means that no other player can use it (like #27 for Simon Lacroix, general manager of Les Ducs d'Angers).



Questioned on the reason why they started playing hockey, the three players present admitted it was mainly because of their fathers. From an early age, they encouraged their sons to practice this popular Canadian sport. Brendan Harms was even named after another famous hockey player. Furthermore, their brothers were also playing hockey and they all watched games on TV when they were younger. Today, they admit not having any hockey role model. Their family is what is the most important thing for them. Their children are their priority and they help them stay focus on the ice. For Jason O'Leary, he doesn't need a role model, he just needs his children, his strength.



Brendan Harms,
Center right winger

To finish, the players were asked what they wished for the next generation of players. They admitted that they already knew that the future generation was better and more talented than the current one! The players and their coach commented that finding your true passion and sticking to your goals were key. If one young player wishes to become professional, he or she should not give up on his dream, work hard in school and most importantly have fun.



Thank you to Les Ducs d'Angers for this interview!
The 3èmes Euro