

Observational Interview with Kris Draper

Anne Marie Krappman, the Detroit Red Wings' community relations manager, has just informed me that I'll be interviewing center Kris Draper following the team's morning practice. My eyes wander down the hall passing over walls listing Detroit's ten Stanley Cup wins and previous NHL award winners as I anxiously wait outside the locker room. Each time the locker room door opens, my heart skips a beat as I see players like captain Steve Yzerman, Darren McCarty, and Henrik Zetterberg walk past me into the adjacent room behind a bright red door. Finally the moment arrives, Draper emerges from the locker room wearing a casual sweater and jeans looking fresh from his recent shower following a strenuous practice and time spent talking to the media. After we introduce ourselves, he guides me into the room beyond the red door. My eyes widen in amazement at the sight of a restaurant setting with Wings' photos galore and numerous players sitting in the back eating lunch. We sit down close to the door where the interview begins.

Draper appears confident, which is undoubtedly from his experience as the Wings' go to guy for the Detroit media, and seems eager to answer my questions. He's been playing professional hockey in Hockeytown since 1993 providing plenty of time for various nicknames to crop up. Most commonly, this 34-year-old redhead is referred to as Drapes, but occasionally teammates will call him Spike in reference to "the little dog who doesn't stop, the little bulldog who keeps going." Whether it's killing the penalty on the ice, playing with his two kids at home, or cheering up a team grouch at practice, Draper always works hard to achieve his very best like his nickname infers.

Like many athletes, specifically hockey players, Draper is a very superstitious individual. His pregame routine is closely followed to prevent any potential mishaps on the ice. During the current NHL season, Draper wasn't performing offensively like he had before the lockout so he made everyone move their locker room stalls back to the previous arrangement. Consequently, he scored a goal that night. A typical game day starts after Draper drops off his daughter Kennedy at school. He drives to Sonny's Restaurant where he orders egg white omelets if the team won their last game. A recent loss results in an order of oatmeal. Following breakfast, Draper attends a half-hour long pregame skate to loosen up and prepare his sticks for the game that's later in the evening. He promptly heads home to eat a home cooked meal and play with his son and daughter. An efficient nap re-energizes his body for the game as does a stop by Tim Horton's where he orders a coffee and chocolate chip muffin because "that's my lucky muffin." Draper arrives at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit about two and a half hours before the game to warm up, stretch, and make sure all final preparations have been made. Once the game is over, the players and their wives will go out for dinner. However, the team often has to head for the airport following the game to fly to their next game's location. But Draper finds it hard to complain about the busy schedules and late nights because "it's something that I've wanted to do ever since I learned how to skate and knew what hockey was."

When Draper isn't at Joe Louis Arena or on a road trip, he's at home with his wife, Julie, and two kids, Kennedy and Kieran. He loves the summer when the NHL is in its off-season because the Toronto native can devote all his time and attention to his family in his hometown. Draper explained to me the challenges of being a father as an NHL player, "During the season there are some stretches when it gets pretty tough;

you're away from your kids on road trips and the kids are wondering when Daddy is coming home." Between training camp, 82 games during the regular season, and a potential for 28 playoff games, the NHL schedule can place a lot of pressure on a family. Draper quickly admits that his wife makes plenty of sacrifices for the family to function, "Every guy here is lucky to have a wife to take care of the kids and kids that understand that Daddy has to go to sleep or Daddy has to go play hockey."

In his NHL career, Draper has gotten his name on the coveted Stanley Cup three times in 1997, 1998, and 2002 as a member of the Detroit Red Wings. Each victory has been memorable for its own reason. The first Cup win because Detroit hadn't won in 42 years and the city was ecstatic to have the Cup back in its grasp. The second victory was special because it was a very inspirational victory after one of the Wings defenseman and staff member were seriously injured in a limo accident in the previous year. However in 2002, Draper was married and had both kids at that point in time so he was able to do little things he had been unable to do in previous wins like placing Kienan in the Stanley Cup and eating "Fruit Loops out of the Stanley Cup with my daughter."

Draper understands how fortunate he is at this point in his life, "Everyday I get to come down here [Joe Louis Arena]. I'm a Detroit Red Wing and I've won three Stanley Cups and everything in hockey is just going really good now." Draper realizes his good fortune and does what he can to help the local community. He is the spokesman for D.A.R.E. and after the 2002 Stanley Cup win, he brought the Stanley Cup to Children's Hospital in Detroit. When the hospital asked Draper to bring in the Cup, it was an easy decision for him to make. "You know as we wake up in the morning, while you guys go to school and I go play hockey; these parents go to the hospital everyday to

visit their kids...Being as fortunate as I am and to go in there and see all the sicknesses and illnesses and be able to put a smile on a kid's face and make kids forget about their illnesses for even just ten minutes; you know you've done something good. It's very rewarding to go in there and do that," Draper explained to me.

While the interview lasted nearly 30 minutes, the moment went by too quick. Before that morning in Joe Louis Arena, Draper was a speedy center who won three Stanley Cups and proudly represented the Detroit Red Wings. Following the interview, he became an individual who was extremely passionate about his hockey and who, above all else, deeply cared for his family. I left the arena with a newfound respect and admiration for the hockey player everyone calls Drapes.