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Stanley Cup showdown

Dwayne Roloson

Edmonton's usually bland Roli the Goalie has been dazzling throughout the playoffs



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The most amazing thing about Dwayne Roloson is his amazing lack of pizzazz. The man is pure tapioca pudding. He is proficient, not flamboyant, and responsible, not rash.

He doesn't rant, rage, pout or walk past his coach to tell the team owner he wants out. His glove hand isn't hailed as the place where slap shots go to die. He's not as big as goaltender Jean-Sébastien Giguère, or as flexible as Miikka Kiprusoff; nor is he as good a puck handler as Martin Brodeur.

But what he is cannot be undervalued or underappreciated, because Albert Dwayne Roloson is the consummate professional. He will do almost anything to improve his game, anything from stretching to lifting weights to positive imagery to eye exercises. Yes, eye exercises.

"I can't tell you what they are," Roloson said when asked to describe a typical eyeball workout. (Best bet? He stares at one of Don Cherry's suits for 60 seconds without blinking.) "It's not something I want to share."

For competitive reasons?

"Yeah," he answered. "I have a personal trainer I started using when I was in Buffalo [with the Sabres] and we do things that are related to hockey. One of the things I did early on was see a sports vision specialist."

Whatever it is Roloson is doing, it's working to near-perfection. These days when hockey people watch him stopping pucks for the Edmonton Oilers, they're seeing a 36-year-old craftsman who doesn't sell his moves like a Las Vegas showman. Instead, Roli the Goalie is reliable and practised and very much responsible for taking the Oilers to the Stanley Cup final.

"[Roloson] has been strong when we've needed the first save," defenceman Steve Staios said in praise. "He's cool back there, and that gives us a lot of confidence. It makes all of us better."

Given his previous National Hockey League experiences, you could understand if Roloson wasn't so steady in goal. Coming out of the University of Massachusetts Lowell, the native of Simcoe, Ont., was never drafted by the NHL. Within four years, he played for the Calgary Flames, Buffalo and the Minnesota Wild, where he settled into the backup job behind Manny Fernandez.

Instead of complaining, Roloson studied other goaltenders and incorporated some of their strengths. He took his stand-up style and added a touch of butterfly. He worked diligently on his post-to-post movement. He watched game video of himself, then worked on his eye muscles to ensure they were every bit as honed as his reflexes.

"I don't know what he does," said friend, former goaltender and ESPN analyst Darren Pang, "but I know goalies who taped coins onto the LPs on their record players and watched them go around. Dwayne is into positive imagery, focusing on the good saves, watching video that can trigger something in his stance and positioning. I don't think you can be 36 years old and still playing goal in the NHL if you didn't have the right abilities and approach."

Pang described Roloson as having "an observant personality," which was one of the reasons why ESPN and ESPN 2 asked Roloson to do colour commentary during the 2004 Stanley Cup playoffs.

"That's probably why he's so accessible to the media [and will do interviews on games days, which most goalies refuse]," Pang noted. "He has an understanding of what the media does."

Roloson's commitment to detail has kept him evolving as a goalie. When he played in university, he allowed his frustrations to boil over when an opposing forward skated into him. When he turned professional, he decided to defuse his temper and not let so much bother him.

Even when he arrived in Edmonton at the 2006 NHL trade deadline, he had to adjust his game. In Minnesota, the Wild defencemen cleared out so Roloson could see the puck better. In Edmonton, the Oilers defencemen dropped to block shots. That made it difficult for Roloson to locate the puck and react before it blew by him.

"The first eight games [with the Oilers], he wasn't doing what he'd done before," Pang said. "His crouch got lower. His head was back or moving around [trying to see past his defencemen]. So the team compromised and he compromised and now there's not a goalie who has put on the pads who's not proud of what he's doing."

Edmonton goaltending coach Pete Peters has also played a role in Roloson's adjustment. When Roloson was in Minnesota, his goaltending coach was Bob Mason. Mason and Peters were once teammates with the Washington Capitals under goaltending guru Warren Strelow. The familiarity of coaching styles, combined with Peters's easygoing personality, has brought out the best in Roloson, whose work habits and eagerness to improve have never been in doubt.

That said, when Edmonton gave up a first-round draft pick for a veteran backup goalie, some thought the Oilers had gone soft in the head. But maybe there's an historical comparison at play, one that goes beyond Bill Ranford's taking the Oilers to their 1990 Stanley Cup win.

When Johnny Bower played in his first of four consecutive NHL all-star games, he was 36. He went on to win four Stanley Cup titles with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Roloson was selected to the 2004 NHL all-star game at 34. Now, he's in the Stanley Cup final, not as the flashiest or most acrobatic goalie, but as one who does one thing and does it well -- he stops the puck.

"I enjoyed my time in Minnesota," Roloson said. "I have a goalie school there that I'm sure I'm not going to be stopping any time soon. But I was elated to come here and my family was ecstatic . . . and we knew that coming here the team had a great opportunity to do something special. So far, we're doing that."

So far, it has been the man with the great vision (and a noticeable lack of flair) who has shown them the way.

596

The total number of shots that

Edmonton goaltender

Dwayne Roloson, who has played

every minute of every game in the playoffs, has had to face.

That's the highest total among

all the playoff teams, an average

of 35.1 shots a game.

9-5

Edmonton's record in games in

which it has been outshot,

evidence of the important role

Roloson has played

during the Oilers' playoff drive.

.814

Saver percentage by Edmonton goal-tenders when the Oilers were killing penalties during the regular season.

.919

Save percentage of Roloson during penalty killing situations in the playoffs.

.898

The save percentage of Edmonton goaltenders when the Oilers played at even strength during the regular season.

.934 Roloson's save percentage in the playoffs ;when the oilers are playing at even strength

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