

Coach to become reality star

Greg Hopf prepares to join coaching staff for hockey-based reality show



Greg Hopf, seen behind the bench during the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships in Quebec last month, will join the coaching staff for the third season of *Hit The Ice*, a hockey-based reality show on APTN.

by James McCarthy
Northern News Services

If people across the country didn't know Greg Hopf before, they certainly will in about five months time.

Hopf has been selected as one of two assistant coaches for *Hit The Ice*, a reality show broadcast on APTN which showcases the best 30 bantam and midget-aged aboriginal hockey players from around Canada.

Hopf said he was through the roof when he was given the news on Tuesday.

"I was literally jumping around in my office," he said. "Derek (Squirrel) came in and wondered what was going on and I told him I was selected and he was pumped, too. I can't believe how excited I am for this."

Hopf will be joining the show for its third season and will be working under the tutelage of head coach John Chabot, who played more than 500 games in the National Hockey League with Montreal, Pittsburgh and Detroit and also had a stint as an assistant coach with the New York Islanders from 2007 to 2009.

"John has been scouting for an entire year and he goes to the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships, hockey academies and has many contacts around," said Hopf.

The show itself is the big portion of the deal but this will also be a training camp, which

means Hopf will have to be up to snuff with his coaching abilities.

To prepare for that, he's in the midst of getting his High Performance I coaching certificate through Hockey Canada. It must be completed before he leaves for the camp in Chateaugay, Que., in July but Hopf said it should be done by the middle of next month.

Once he's there, Hopf said he's going in with the attitude of being a sponge.

"Learning what I can, gaining as much knowledge as I can," he said. "I'm going to learn from them but at the same time, they will learn from

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me. As coaches, we steal and we share everything and that's how I'm approaching this. I want to teach them, not only about hockey, but about life in the North and how hockey is here."

As for his coaching style, the one big thing Hopf said he'll notice that's different from him is how the other coaches will have systematic plays down pat and that all comes down to the amount of ice time the kids get during any point of the season.

"They play around 80 games a year and we're lucky to get around 15 or 20," he said. "With the systematic stuff, we're behind because of that lack of game experience. I'm the kind of coach that trusts the players and demands respect among each other but a great team manages to get

everything together and gets everyone on the same page. John has his style, I have my style and we're all going to learn from each other."

After the camp concludes Aug. 10, Hopf said he knows he'll come home with an arsenal of new ideas and styles, which he hopes he can implement to the programs already in place.

But there's a chance he may not come home because this camp is also a scouting combine. There are scouts who come from major junior hockey leagues, universities and hockey academies. Most of the coaches who have worked are now employed across the country in good-paying positions and Hopf could be in that same boat if all goes well.

"I'm going to network myself down there and who knows?" He said. "I may get myself a job as a coach with a junior team or a university team or a hockey academy and that would be so awesome."

But right now, Hopf is just worried about getting on the ice and the one thing he said he'll have to get used to is the cameras, which will be on him almost 24/7. But he says it's not going to be a distraction.

"There's a camera following you all the time," he said. "If I'm talking to a player, it's not going to distract me because you're in full game mode."

"When you're behind the bench and you see a kid make a mistake, you're going to explain that mistake to him, camera or no camera. That won't bother me because you're so focused on what you have to do."