

From USA Hockey Magazine

American Star

Klee Stays Plenty Busy While NHL Season On Ice

By Bob Schaller

The NHL lockout has opened a door to a whole new world for Ken Klee.

While Klee and the rest of his Toronto Maple Leaf teammates remain on the sidelines, the 33-year-old defenseman has taken to being a husband, dad and “hockey parent” to a whole new level. In short, he’s turned what could be a negative and found positives to glean from it.

“We could obviously sit around and feel sorry for ourselves that we’re not playing and not getting paid — not doing what we do and are used to doing,” says Klee, who last saw the ice as a member of Team USA at the World Cup of Hockey.

“For some of the younger guys, playing in Europe is a good opportunity and it is what’s best for them. But I’m taking care of my kids and trying to stay in shape. Going to my kids’ hockey — my boys are 5 and 6 — has been great. We’ve gone skiing, too.”

Klee’s wife is pregnant with their third child, so he’s taken on the role of getting the boys up and ready for school, even making breakfast — which isn’t a problem since he learned to cook at a young age.

In his own hockey career, Klee marched up through the ranks of the USA Hockey program. He says a chance to play for the U.S. National Junior Team in 1991 and 1992 opened more doors — as he looks back on it — than he ever imagined at the time.

“I’ve been involved with the USA Hockey program at pretty much every level,” says Klee, who was drafted by the Washington Capitals in the 1990 NHL Entry Draft.

“It’s an honor anytime you are asked to play for, and represent, your country. But for me, the World Junior Tournament was obviously a big step for me, because all the NHL scouts and general managers go there looking for future NHL players. I had been drafted the summer before, but that was a big jump for me, and it allowed them to see I was a pretty good player.”

Though he enjoys living in Morrison, Colo., a small town outside of Denver, he says playing in hockey’s Canadian Mecca is also a privilege.

“It’s fantastic,” he says. “We had a great year last year in Toronto. It’s an awesome city to play in, the kind of situation where hockey is the biggest thing going on for people as far as sports and entertainment.”

And though he skates several times a week with as many as seven NHL players now, he enjoys the anonymity that goes with playing away from the glare of the Denver sports scene.

“Since I’m not an Avalanche player, I don’t get recognized as far as the hockey stuff,” says Klee, a native of Indianapolis.

“I don’t get asked all the time for autographs, or even get recognized. It happens sometimes at the rink, but I don’t have a problem with that — it’s an honor, too, to represent the sport in those interactions with fans and signing autographs.”

He does enjoy catching local college hockey games on TV, and marvels at the growth of hockey at all levels in a state known more for skiing.

“Hockey is huge in Colorado now,” Klee says. “My boys are playing for the Foothills program, and they have 125 kids in the 8 & Under program; they had such great response. And it is that way statewide from what I have heard.”

Don’t think though that Klee doesn’t know his place as a parent.

“I’ve helped out a few times, but I’m just there to be a supportive dad,” he says.

His biggest problem now is closer to home. It seems that hours of home-improvement television viewing and several dozen trips to the local hardware store built up his confidence to where he decided to take on some home repairs.

“It didn’t work out too good,” he says with a laugh. “I had the ‘mud’ and tape, and used it all on a little area. I looked at it and could tell right away, ‘This is not right — not how it is supposed to look.’ The neighbors had to bail me out on this one.”

Chalk up a big assist for the stay-at-home defenseman.

Bob Schaller is a freelance writer in Colorado Springs, Colo.