

Tom Reid is always good for a smile and a story

The Wild will start its 16th season Thursday night in St. Louis, and so will Tom Reid as an analyst for its games on the radio.



The North Stars were in the final weeks of a lousy second season in Minnesota when Wren Blair, the general manager and coach, made a trade on Feb. 14, 1969: forward Andre Boudrias and defenseman Mike McMahon to Chicago for forward Bill Orban and Tom Reid, a 22-year-old defenseman.

A month earlier, Blair had made another trade of defensemen, sending Duane Rupp to Pittsburgh for veteran Leo Boivin.

The Penguins were making a visit to Met Center a year later when Rupp's stick caught Reid in the left eye. It was bad enough that Reid was taken to a hospital.

The meal money on the road for players was \$12 per day. The North Stars were heading out for a road trip and the first \$12 had been issued to the players before the Pittsburgh game.

“There was bleeding behind the eye,” Reid said. “I still was in the hospital the next morning and wasn’t going to make the trip. I got a call from Wren’s secretary. She said, ‘Tom, when you get out of the hospital and come back to the arena, would you please bring in \$12, since you’re not on the trip.’”

Tom Reid gave the mischievous smile for which he could have a trademark and said: “She was a great lady, but she worked for Wren, and he wanted to make sure the team didn’t get shorted 12 bucks.”

The Wild will start its 16th season Thursday night in St. Louis, and so will Reid as an analyst for its games. He was asked about the different world in which NHL players live today, compared with what it was like on his arrival in Minnesota. The anecdote about the 12 bucks did a fine job of explaining that.

As did this:

Reid was a rookie with the Blackhawks during the NHL’s expansion season of 1967-68. Stan Mikita was a Chicago legend. Early in Reid’s time with the Blackhawks, Mikita was quizzing Reid on the size of contract the young blueliner had been able to squeeze from General Manager Tommy Ivan.

Reid’s response was: “I can’t tell you, Stan. Mr. Ivan asked me not to reveal it to anyone. He doesn’t want it to get around the locker room and upset some guys.”

Mikita pressed and Reid finally confessed Ivan had awarded him with the kingly sum of \$10,000.

“Great negotiating, kid,” Mikita said. “That’s the minimum.”

The results of Blair's trade with the Blackhawks in mid-February 1969 were split: Orban totaled 30 games for the North Stars. Reid played 604 in the regular season, and another 33 in the playoffs.

This included several weeks' worth of games in 1974, when Reid was struck near the left temple while blocking a shot, suffering a broken orbital bone, a fractured cheekbone and a broken jaw.

"They wired my jaw shut, I put on a helmet with a one-bar facemask, and missed one game," Reid said. "I wasn't a hero. That's the way it was then."

Reid showed the trademark smile again and said:

"I went from 204 pounds to 182 before they took the wires out and I could eat again. I took a blender on the road. I'd put hamburger, mashed potatoes, vegetables in there, blend it and drink that.

"Then, the blender broke in the middle of a road trip. The team said, 'We're sure not going to buy you a new blender.'"

A blender would've cost more than 12 bucks.

Reid is not an old-timer whining about the good life that today's NHL players enjoy. He thinks it's wonderful the workforce is getting its share of the league's prosperity.

"The North Stars' franchise cost \$2 million in 1966, and Las Vegas is paying \$500 million for its franchise," Reid said. "I know it's 50 years, but that's impressive inflation."

Plus, Reid gets to share in the good life, to a degree. He gets to fly on the team charters to and from games, which beats the middle seat on the DC-3 commercial flights of his youth.

On Thursday, the Wild opens its 16th season in St. Louis. Reid has missed

four of those games, in 2008-09 after knee surgery. He was on TV for two seasons with Mike Goldberg, then elected to join his friend Bob Kurtz for the less-boisterous radio broadcasts that actually slip in a degree of objectivity.

Reid's playing career ended prematurely in 1978 with a still-mysterious and terrible skin rash tied to hockey equipment. He was given a chance to be the radio analyst for the great Al Shaver, and then did Stars television with several partners (including Kurtz). There also were the Gophers years as an analyst.

He's excited about this Wild team, because of both the roster and new coach Bruce Boudreau, and also because it is supposed to be this way on Opening Night.

"I'm always excited for the start of a season," Reid said. "I'm always optimistic. It's just some years, there's more reason for that than others. I think this is one of those."