

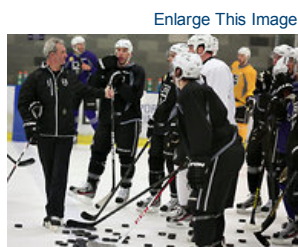
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Kings Have Stability and Tight Schedule on Their Side in Bid to Repeat

By KAREN CROUSE
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EL SEGUNDO, Calif. — On the second day of the N.H.L.'s truncated training camps, six news vans and satellite trucks parked in the lot of the training center shared by the Los Angeles Kings and the Angeles Lakers.



Robert Gauthier/Los Angeles Times, via Associated Press

Coach Darryl Sutter and the Kings at their first practice Sunday. Los Angeles was the first eighth seed to win the Stanley Cup.

The defending Stanley Cup champion Kings finished their Monday morning practice outside the glare of the television cameras. Their injured center Anze Kopitar, who produced 20 points in 20 playoff games, tested his sprained right knee for the first time during a 30-minute skate in front of two team employees and a handful of print and online journalists clicking away on their smartphone cameras.

The television cameras flocked to the practice court of the Lakers, whose injured center, Dwight Howard, had returned to the lineup the night before and produced 22 points in 29 minutes for the last N.B.A. team to record its first victory of the new calendar year.

Welcome to Los Angeles, where dysfunction rules even as the Kings, after a seven-month hiatus, finally are able to begin their reign. Their campaign to become the first team since Detroit in 1998 to win back-to-back Stanley Cup championships starts Saturday with a home game against the Chicago Blackhawks. Before the puck drops, the players will receive their championship rings and the fans will get replicas of the title banner that will be raised to the rafters during a ceremony that had to wait for three months because of the lockout.

The Kings were one of the feel-good stories of 2012, but that was then. The new season, said the team's president and general manager, Dean Lombardi, "is not about recapturing that feeling, it's about writing a new story."

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The roster that compiled a 16-4 record in the postseason returns intact, no small advantage in a lockout-shortened 48-game season. The Kings on Sunday added forward Anthony Stewart, a former first-round draft pick of the Florida Panthers whom they

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acquired in a trade that sent Kevin Westgarth, who was not on their playoff roster, to the Carolina Hurricanes.

“It’s an advantage if we’re healthy, but unfortunately, we’re not,” said Kings Coach Darryl Sutter, who begins his first full season, such as it is, at the helm of the team after replacing Terry Murray, who was fired last December.

He added, “When we won the championship last year, if you look at the lineup we fielded from the middle of January on, it was pretty much intact.”

In addition to Kopitar, who was injured while playing in Sweden during the lockout, the veteran defenseman Willie Mitchell has been kept off the ice while rehabilitating from off-season knee surgery.

One player Sutter is not worried about is his star goaltender, Jonathan Quick, who had back surgery in August. Quick’s physician, Dr. Robert Watkins, also operated on the Howard in April.

Quick was bothered all spring by a herniated disk that pinched his sciatic nerve. Playing through the discomfort, Quick posted a 1.41 goals-against average and .946 save percentage in the postseason on his way to earning the Conn Smythe Trophy.

If the season had started on time, Quick would not have been cleared to play. The condensed schedule, with its average of 3.44 games a week, sets up well for Quick and the Kings, who dominated the postseason after squeaking into the playoffs in the eighth and final spot. On the way to becoming the first eighth seed in the N.H.L. to win the Stanley Cup, they went unbeaten on the road and dispatched the first, second and third seeds.

“The tempo, the speed, the urgency of every game, it’s going to feel like the playoffs all over again,” Quick said.

Quick, who turns 27 two days after the season opener, was one of 10 Connecticut-born players in the N.H.L. last season. There have been only 28 in the league’s history, and he was proud to parade the Stanley Cup in front of nearly 200 of his friends and neighbors during an August weekend-long celebration in his hometown, Hamden.

The mood was much more somber when he returned in December, for a weekend visit, during a break in his training with the Kings’ minor league team in Manchester, N.H. Accompanied by his pregnant wife, Jaclyn, and their toddler daughter, Madison, Quick started on the three-and-half-hour drive.

On the radio, they heard a news bulletin about a shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., about 30 miles west of Hamden. Over the next couple of hours, they learned more about the massacre of 20 first graders and 6 school staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary.

“As you get closer and closer to Connecticut and driving through Connecticut, every radio station’s covering it,” Quick said. “My daughter’s sleeping in the back, and I look over and my wife, who’s due in April, is crying. I just had to turn the radio off.”

Quick said he will hold Newtown in his heart this season.

“There’s no words you can say that mean anything, you know?” Quick said. “At the end of the day, no matter what you do or say, it’s not going to give any justice to what took place.”

Later on Monday, Quick and his teammates traveled across town to Staples Center for a practice attended by more than 6,000 fans and televised on a sports cable network. The 119-day lockout was but a blink for a franchise that waited 45 years to celebrate its first Stanley Cup.

It matters little to the Kings that they are entering uncharted territory, or that they have had to wait so long to raise their championship banner. Their theme for this season is “The

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