

Bob Baruth: More Than A G.M.

Back in 1970, when Bob 'Bullet' Baruth became General Manager of the St. John's Hockey squad, people thought he was ready for the men with the white jackets. Saying St. John's would have a victorious hockey team in a few years was like saying the moon is made out of cheese. It just wasn't said around people who knew anything about athletics. But Bob Baruth was different.

"I had faith in the players and in myself," he said last week as he announced his retirement. "That first year was the toughest," Baruth continued. "Nobody knew position hockey. That first year, we missed the playoffs by three points due to inexperience. I kept telling everybody that you have to build a team in the beginning. We're lucky we were blessed with 3 top freshman, Chris Coen, Bob Lazuta and Billy Morrissey."

That first year was also the most important one. It was the year the St. John's Redmen would gain recognition from the other clubs in the Metropolitan Intercollegiate Hockey League that they could be contenders for the league title the next season. "Our very first game in 1971, we sold out Skateland Arena," recalled Baruth, tagged the "bullet" because of his swiftness in tongue and agility in skates during his playing days. "We beat Manhattan 5-1. We had Capt. Miggins as our coach, too. He did a wonderful job. He couldn't do any better. Without him, I would have been lost."

That year, the Johnnies finished second in the standings and their captain, Gary Nichols, scored 40 goals. The Redmen also began to develop their defensive prowess. Both Billy Morrissey and Tom Stapleton were recognized as two of the best defensemen in the circuit. But the players on the team began to realize they would be lost without Bob Baruth. "I became like a second father to them," explained Bullet. "They would come to me with their problems and I would try to help them the best I could."

Last year the Johnnies began to run into problems. No less than five

players were lost for certain games because of league suspensions. Ed Kern was lost for the whole season because of fighting infractions. One player, Rich Maila, managed to get smacked above the eye with the elusive puck while sitting on the bench. It took 8 stitches to close the wound. Bob Baruth began to buy stock in the Bristol Meyers Company with all the Alka-Seltzers he was taking. "You couldn't fault the coaches," sighed Bullet, referring to coaches Bob Bailey and Gary Nichols. "They did a great job." But the Johnnies finished the season 10-5-1 and lost to Nassau Community College in the MET Playoffs.

Perhaps one can say that Bob Baruth likes to eat, sleep and drink hockey. "I love the game," he said with a smile. "I played Roller Hockey when I was 11 years old. Then I played in the Long Island Hockey League. I had a tryout with the Rangers when I was 18, but I didn't make it."

Bullet played for numerous amateur hockey contingents, one being the Brooklyn Torpedoes in 1945. Then he joined the Long Island Americans as they reeled off 56 straight wins in 2 years. In 1968, Bob joined the SJU Mail Room. Now, at the age of 54, he plans to retire to Mattituck, Long Island, 92 miles away from St. John's and hockey civilization. "I'm going to miss this school and the boys. I'm proud of them. They were all like my own sons," said Bullet as his voice cracked. "I'll always appreciate what St. John's did for me." Bullet named all the people who have helped him with the team. One of those names was Charlie Russo. "My job would have been twice as hard if it wasn't for Charlie. He was my Public Relations Man."

"We're going to miss Bullet Baruth a great deal," chimed captain Billy Morrissey. "He did plenty for the team." And Rick Maila said, "He kept the team on its feet. He knows his hickey."

Perhaps one university's loss is Mattituck, Long Island's gain. But St. John's is losing a great deal.