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THE PHOENIX COYOTES

An up-close and personal conversation with co-owners Anthony LeBlanc and George Gosbee on the team, their goals, and living in Scottsdale

BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

PHOTO BY CARL SCHULTZ

“The team is here to stay.”

This seems to be the mantra for two of the new Phoenix Coyote owners, George Gosbee and Anthony LeBlanc. The two men are part of a nine-person group that formed IceAcquisition Co., LLC and purchased the NHL hockey team this past August. The Phoenix Coyotes, once the Winnipeg Jets, came to Phoenix back in 1996. Ten years ago next month, the team played its first game in the brand new Jobing.com Arena in Glendale.

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Despite such a bright future at the time, the team's stability has been a source of contention since 2009 when the previous owner declared bankruptcy. The Coyotes have continued to play under the management of the NHL, but fans were always wondering if the team would end up somewhere else. In August 2013, however, the team was purchased by IceAcquisition and fans were told they could relax, because the owners intend to keep the team right here in Phoenix.

WHY HOCKEY?

Seven of the nine new owners are originally from Canada, so owning a hockey team was a dream for them all. President, CEO and co-owner LeBlanc sums it up perfectly: "It's tough to find a Canadian boy not enamored with hockey," he says. Chairman, governor, and co-owner Gosbee agrees. "We're all passionate hockey fans," he explains.

Buying the Coyotes was an easy decision for the men. Gosbee says they all see great potential for having a hockey team in the desert. "We're positive about the future of hockey, bullish on the NHL and where it's going."

LeBlanc says the group examined a number of markets before purchasing the Coyotes. "We looked at opportunities in other places. We totally believe in this market. Other nontraditional hockey markets have done very well. There's been so much uncertainty for the past few years [regarding the Coyotes], but we see so much potential here."

FROM CANADA TO ARIZONA

Both LeBlanc and Gosbee are Canadians, but look forward to spending more time than ever in Arizona. The men have impressive backgrounds in other industries. Gosbee is a native of Alberta, Calgary, and graduated from the University of Calgary with a bachelor of commerce degree specializing in finance and petroleum land management. During his 20-year career in corporate finance, investment banking and global capital markets, he has worked for a variety of firms and has won accolades in Canada for his achievements. Currently, Gosbee is vice chair of Alberta Investment

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Management Company, a \$70 billion investment fund partnered with ATB Financial, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Government of Alberta.

Gosbee continues to commute back and forth from Calgary to Arizona. "We also have a house in California," he explains. "We'll be looking to sell that and buy a home in Arizona."

But for now, Gosbee finds himself traveling a lot for work and family. The father of three—two boys and a girl—spends much of his free time following his two sons, who are both avid hockey players.

Gosbee says he's ready to stay in Arizona for the long-term. "You have to take a long-term approach to the future of the team," he explains. "We're here to build a winning organization both on and off the ice."

LeBlanc was born in northern Quebec and raised in Ontario. He has a degree in political science from Lakehead University and has spent the past 20 years as a sales and marketing executive for such companies as Corel Corporation and Giga Information Group. He served as vice

president of global sales for Research in Motion (now BlackBerry) from 2000 to 2008. He is currently looking for a home here. "We are committed to the region," says LeBlanc. "Out of the nine owners, we have all either purchased homes here or are looking." LeBlanc says being part of the community is extremely important to him.

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE COYOTES

The co-owners can't emphasize enough how much they are committed to keeping the Coyotes in Arizona. They both say the team is poised to really hit the ice with a storm in the coming years.

"It starts with the facility," explains Gosbee. "Jobing.com Arena is a phenomenal facility. It really is one of the great arenas in hockey today."

Gosbee's biggest goal for the team? "Winning the Stanley Cup," he says, laughing. "Seriously, our job as owners is to leave the hockey operations to the coaches and team but give them the resources they need both on and off the ice. You can't get a better team than this. We have the best coaching team in the NHL. It's super important to us to have huge community involvement. That is equally if not more important than what happens on the ice."

LeBlanc encourages locals to come out and see a live hockey game. "If you've never been to a hockey game," he explains, "you really must come on out and see one. It's exciting and the fans are great."

As part of their initiative to get the local community more involved in the game of hockey here in Phoenix, the team has several new initiatives, including a series of tailgating parties. Like traditional tailgating parties for football, LeBlanc says they envision that same level of excitement at Jobing.com Arena for the hockey fans.

"We also have new concessionaries," he explains, "so fans will see some great new food and beverage offerings."

For Gosbee, having a team that is not only successful but a part of the local culture is important. "My ultimate dream," he says with the wistfulness of someone truly passionate about his work, "is to someday have Phoenix Coyotes players who were born in Arizona and grew up with the team."