

Gallant Great Behind Vegas Bench

By Dave Lukow

Gerard Gallant took the Vegas Golden Knights where nobody expected them to go, the 2018 Stanley Cup Final. Yes, Vegas lost the last round of the playoffs to the Washington Capitals in five games, but for an expansion team to be playing for the Stanley Cup is beyond unusual.

The Golden Knights beat big odds to total 109 points in the regular season, win the Pacific Division, and capture the Western Conference title. Gallant, the head coach of Vegas, deserves much of the credit.

The coach of the Florida Panthers from 2014 into the 2016-17 season, Gallant guided Florida to the playoffs and a first-place finish in the Atlantic Division in 2016. The Panthers were 11-10-1 when he was fired the next season.

On April 13, 2017, Vegas named the former NHL forward its first head coach. Those calling shots for Florida, which missed the playoffs this season, must be kicking themselves.

In January, after the Golden Knights had gotten off to a torrid start, Gallant was tabbed to coach the Pacific Division in the 2018 NHL All-Star Game. On February 1, Vegas set a league record for most wins (34) ever by an expansion team. It took them 50 games to get there. They secured first in the Pacific Division March 31, becoming the first true expansion franchise in the four major sports - NHL, NFL, NBA, MLB - to win their division (this doesn't count all-expansion divisions).

On April 25, Gallant was nominated, for the second time in his career, for the Jack Adams Award, given to the NHL coach "adjudged to have contributed the most to his team's success."

The NHL Awards, where the winner of the Jack Adams Award will be announced, take place June 20.

As a player, Gallant appeared in 615 games with the Detroit Red Wings and Tampa Bay Lightning. He totaled 211 goals, 480 points and 1,674 penalty minutes. In 1988-89 with Detroit, he had 39 goals, 93 points and 230 penalty minutes.