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The firing of Don Cherry

by KEITH SCHELL

Well, the suits that ran Rogers Sportsnet on November 11, 2019, finally got their way: they finally found an excuse to fire Don Cherry.

That was truly a sad day for much of Canada; or more specifically, truly a sad day for blue-collar and small-town English Canada. The white-collar people in the big cities always tended to look down on Cherry and his traditional small-town Canada attitudes, especially the people who ran the CBC (and now Rogers Sportsnet). And French Canada has never truly warmed up to Cherry for reasons of their own, despite Cherry's tireless Canada-first work highlighting worthwhile charities, courageous Canadian Soldiers both past and present, heroic First Responders and current-day hockey-loving children who perished under tragic circumstances. The people who ran the networks were probably popping champagne corks in celebration of the firing at the time.

Don Cherry has always been a very polarizing figure; you either love him or you hate him for reasons of your own and there is usually no middle ground. (How could a guy who only got seven minutes a week to speak get so many people so riled up so fast?) And while I don't always agree with him, I love him because of his unwavering and unconditional love and support for the best damn country in the whole wide world, Canada.

I've always felt that Canadians need to be a bit more outwardly and positively expressive in their pride for the country. But Canadian pride does tend to come out in certain situations and hockey is one of those things where Canadian pride really manifests itself.

And because of that, Don Cherry and ?Coaches Corner' have become a tradition in this country; but sadly, Canadian traditions in this country are slowly being chipped away and discarded by the people who run our television networks.

I was watching Coaches Corner the night Cherry said what he said on Saturday, November 9, 2019. Despite his poor choice of words, I understood where he was coming from at the time and I agreed with his broader intent. Don Cherry is many things, but it was not his intent to be racist that night and he even said so the next day. All he was trying to do was to get the people in the cities to buy and wear a poppy to support the soldiers who made our way of life possible. The poppy campaign still goes fairly strong in small-town Canada, but the biggest cities in Canada are becoming very international and cosmopolitan.

And because of this, Canadian traditions and values in those cities are beginning to fall by the wayside. Cherry simply wanted the people in the cities to buy a poppy as an outward showing of support and appreciation for the privilege of being Canadian by giving something back to the people who made this society what it is at the cost of their lives. Is that so muchto ask?

To be fair, Cherry never did express himself well; his grasp of the English language at times is dubious at best. And because of that, combined with his candour and blunt honesty, a lot of what he said could be taken the wrong way if you were so inclined and that got him into hot water more than once over the years. But the average small-town Canadian usually knew exactly what he meant.

And many people in this country, especially in the heartland outside of the big cities, responded positively to his raw honesty and love of hockey and country. They knew he meant every word he said. And they love Canada as much as Cherry does and want to maintain the positive traditions that made this country great in the first place.

Despite Cherry sticking up for him in the past, Ron MacLean did not return the favour and the next night threw Cherry under the bus. He apologized to the nation for what Cherry said on the Sunday night Rogers Hometown Hockey Pregame broadcast. But Cherry's not like that. I can probably guess what happened when the network spoke to Cherry: they asked him to apologize and he refused. He probably said he had no reason to apologize for anything because he meant every word he said. And that finally gave the network the long-awaited excuse to fire him.

Don Cherry is an Umpire in the great game of life. He calls them as he sees them, whether you like it or not. And once he makes the call he won't back down from it no matter what, especially when he thinks he's right. A rare and courageous quality in a public figure in this day and age.

Despite only having a pulpit of seven minutes a week to speak from over the years, Don Cherry became an icon in this country. And whether you love him or you hate him, Saturday nights since he was fired have not been the same.

(P.S. Remember to support the veterans and get a poppy! Lest we forget.)