

SAN JOSE SHARKS: HOW THEY
MADE SAN JOSE A BETTER PLACE

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INTRODUCTION

Before the San Jose Sharks came to town, San Jose was just an industrial mecca. San Jose was a city full of computer companies and software manufacturers. Although San Jose is still a major player in the computer industry, it is now also home to a National Hockey League franchise called the San Jose Sharks. In the following sections, the effects of the San Jose Sharks on the community and how they have made San Jose a world renowned city will be discussed. Before the Sharks came to San Jose, it was one of the few major cities without a professional sports organization or major event center that could house huge concerts and other things such as the Circus. But before San Jose could have a professional sports organization call it home, they would have to have a stadium which could adequately supply the great needs of professional sports.

On the 1988 ballot there was a vote whether or not to build a beautiful new stadium just outside of downtown San Jose, yet close enough to make downtown a big part of the stadium."You can't find anybody now who says they voted against the Arena in 1988," stated ex-mayor Tom McEnery after seeing its success.¹

While in the process of putting the Arena on the ballot many people had their doubts." I wondered if we needed an Arena, I mean Oaklands pretty close." said San Jose resident Catherine Voip². The Sharks have brought many jobs to the valley and helped out the downtown night life. San Jose is now also part of the National Hockey League break-out roller hockey tournament every year. Since

the Sharks became San Jose's team, they needed a practice facility and that's how the Ice Center began. Before the Ice Center there were a few ice hockey rinks where people could go skate and even fewer junior hockey leagues. When the Ice Center opened up that all changed.

THE BEGINNING

When George and Gordon Gund made the decision that they could not keep their National Hockey League team afloat in Minnesota and decided to sell their Minnesota North Stars team and try to start a new franchise in the west, they were not sure where or when their new team would surface if it did at all. They did know that they wanted to start a team in Northern California. They were thinking either in San Francisco or Oakland, but not San Jose. For all we know, the team could have easily ended up in Oakland had the Oakland Coliseum's management not been so tied up in trying to bring the Raiders back to Oakland.

Also had Howard Baldwin not been pushing the National Hockey League on behalf of the San Jose grass roots hockey group ultimately making it easier for the Gunds to choose San Jose. And if Baldwin and the Gunds hadn't reached an agreement for the Gunds to bring hockey back to the Bay Area while giving Baldwin a chunk of the brothers Minnesota North Stars franchise?

There are many questions that surround the Sharks landing in San Jose, but as Sharks president Art Savage stated, "Certainly a lot of good decisions were made and calculated risks were taken that worked out well, but some of the things that happened involved simple good fortune. We probably needed some luck along the way and we got it."³

On March 21, 1991, Sharks President Art Savage and Sharks owner George Gund presented the National Hockey League with the Fifty Million dollar

expansion fee for the San Jose Sharks⁴. As of that day the Sharks were an official professional organization. Once the Sharks were official then came the details of making the San Jose Arena into a hockey friendly environment. It took some general changes in the layout of the Arena, but all and all it was not too difficult to turn the Arena into a professional hockey stadium. On May 9, 1990, it was final. The San Jose Sharks were totally approved.

HARD TIMES

During the dispersal draft in May of 1991, the Sharks acquired their first players. The first player selected by the San Jose Sharks was winger Pat Fallon from the Western Hockey League champion Spokane. For the first two years of the Shark's professional days, they were to play in the old Cow Palace in the San Francisco suburb of Daly City, while the San Jose Arena was to be built. As the first game approached, hockey fever had struck the Bay Area. The Sharks were already almost as popular as the Forty-niners. Many people had never been to a professional hockey game and tickets to the first Sharks Games were hard to get. The fans that were able to get into the smallest National Hockey League arena were treated to an awesome laser show and welcomed by the Sharks owners George and Gordon Gund and Sharks president Art Savage. The Sharks gave their fans their money's worth when in overtime Kelly Kisio scored the game winning goal against Calgary." It was like the Sharks had won the Stanley Cup," stated season ticket holder Matt Clark⁵. Over their first two years the Sharks set the record for worst record with a mark of 11-72-2. Although the dismal play Sharks fans stood behind their team and while the Sharks were the worst team in the National Hockey League, it would of never been known by the merchandise sales and continuous sellouts at the Cow Palace. "Even if they don't win my kids enjoy it", stated season ticket holder Matt Clark⁶. "That is the general feeling at most Sharks games". People enjoyed seeing hockey's greats such as Wayne

Gretzky and the Los Angeles Kings, or Mario Lemieux and his Pittsburgh Penguins who were the Stanley Cup Champions in 1992-93 season. "And occasionally the Sharks would win a game and that adds to the enthusiasm" points out season ticket holder Michael Giordano⁷.

"I have played for many other teams but never have I seen so much excitement for a team with such a terrible record." stated Sharks captain Doug Wilson⁸.

The general feeling in 1992-93 season was that the Sharks were an expansion team and were not expected to play well. Most expansion teams, no matter what sport their in don't preform well for a few years. What the Sharks lacked like most other expansion teams was the experience of winning close games and they were short on good veterans to help the young players mature."They play there hearts out but they just don't seem to be able to pull off the tight games." said Chris Berman of ESPN⁹.

HOMECOMING

After two long years of Sharks fans watching the Sharks in an old rink where the seats were bad and the games not so good, everyone was ready for the Sharks to make their debut in the San Jose Arena. Everyone stood to profit from this, from the city of San Jose to the store owners of downtown San Jose and of course the people of San Jose. For two years, the citizens had seen what at first was a huge hole in the ground transform into a beautiful and highly advanced stadium. The Sharks did not win their first home game at the San Jose Arena but that did not matter to most people for they were happy to have their team home. Many fans had traveled to the Cow Palace the previous season and were just glad to be so close to home.

The Sharks started off disappointingly 0-8-1 at the beginning of their 1993-94 season, but as veteran players stepped up they began to play well at home, and with goalie Artur Irbe stepping up in goal the Sharks became a team to be reckoned with¹⁰. They had great depth with good veterans and some good young players too. The Sharks made a late season run and for the first time in their brief history they were in the playoffs. In only its first season, the San Jose Arena would host playoff games. The greatest turn around in National Hockey League history had been pulled off. Much credit was rewarded to the fans who night after night filled the San Jose Arena and routed the Sharks on through highs and lows. "Our fans are so loud it's just unbelievable. There isn't a building in the

league with more noise than this. They just lift us up whenever we need it,” said Sharks player Jayson Moore after a playoff win against the Detroit Red Wings¹¹.

ALMOST A MIRACLE

The Sharks were not expected to make the playoffs and when they did they were considered as an early out in the tournament for they had to face the Number 1 ranked Detroit Red Wings. To every one's surprise, the Sharks won the first game by the final score of San Jose 3 and Detroit 2¹². This shocked the hockey world, but still most thought they had just got lucky. But with 6 minutes 35 seconds left on the clock in Game seven, Jamie Baker put in the game's winning goal advancing the Sharks to the second round and capping off what was one of the biggest upsets in Stanley Cup Playoffs. The Sharks had earned themselves great respect and the title of a Cinderella team and Stanley Cup contender.

In the Second round they were faced up against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Once again the Sharks showed their tenacity and determination beating Toronto 3-2 in the first Game¹³. They also won the 3rd game of the series at home led by their first ever playoff hat trick carded by Dallas-cast-off Ulf Dahlen. In Game six with the San Jose Sharks ahead in the series 3-2, Sandis Ozolinsh hits the post in sudden death overtime and just moments later Toronto scores to even the series at three a piece. In Game seven the sharks could not come back from a 2-0 deficit and accepted their fate but not without making a magical run.

On a gloomy wet day in Guadalupe Park, 10,000 people showed up to support the Sharks¹⁴. Although they did not have the Stanley Cup raised above

their heads they did have a lot of pride. “This story is an entire community accomplishing something that we’d all dreamed about,” said Sharks coach Kevin Constantine¹⁵. Not only did many of their fans come out to show their support for the team, the Sharks also gained the respect and admiration of many others who were previously ignorant towards the Sharks. “I’ve gotten letters from kindergarten teachers saying they use the sharks as an example of never quitting , never stop trying,” coach Kevin Constantine¹⁶.

Throughout the Stanley Cup Playoffs the Sharks earned much deserved respect from both the fans and their peers. The Toronto Maple Leafs coach Pat Burns said, “That’s a damn good hockey club. They just wouldn’t die.”¹⁷

Toronto went on to lose in the next round but they admitted that the Sharks were a much tougher match for them. Not only was Toronto impressed with the Shark’s gritty toughness but by their determination and drive for success. Toronto captain Doug Gilmour said, “I’m glad this series is over with, we got a few good breaks and took advantage of them, otherwise we would have been beat.”

Sharks coach Kevin Constantine said, “Without the fans we are nothing, this story is about an entire community accomplishing something we all have dreamed about.”¹⁸ That was the same attitude that the whole Sharks team had after their amazing playoff run.

WORLD'S TEAM

After the San Jose Shark's improbable run in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, they became a worlds team. Prince William, the son of Charles and Diana was seen wearing a Sharks hat while skiing in the Austrian Alps. United States president Bill Clinton has been see displaying Sharks paraphanalia. The Sharks have became overnight successes both in the states and overseas. There is a Sharks store located in Riga, Lativa, which is in central Europe. The Sharks teal and black colors are world renowned and almost anywhere you go you would be able to buy sharks merchandise. In Russia the San Jose Sharks are their favorite National Hockey League team because of the many great Russian players such as Igor Larianov, Sergei Makarov and many more who tote the Sharks teal and black. "I've never played for a Worlds Team, but this is pretty close to it" said Sharks Goalie Arturs Irbe(1993).¹⁹

Not only are the Sharks popular with the people who really don't follow hockey, but they are also favored by hockey lovers."Never before have I played a road game where I saw more visiting team fans than home," said Sharks co-captain Jeff Bodger²⁰. The Sharks are one of the few teams that rarely feels they are not at home; whether they are playing in San Jose or in Toronto they still are crowd favorites.

ECONOMIC SUCCESS

With the Sharks having only a few good years their success is still unbelievable. Downtown San Jose on nights of Sharks game is a madhouse. Local restaurant owners say that business is so much better on days of which the Sharks play at home. Since the coming of the Sharks the De Anza hotel has been able to remodel their hotel and bring their business up with out of town fans staying there during regular season and playoff games.

The National Hockey League All-Star game which was held in San Jose at the San Jose Arena this year. It was very well-attended and offered things for people of all ages to do and to see. Also many local business got great exposure through both the amount of people there and the fact that most of the people were from out of town. These tourists went out to eat a lot and bought many things at local shops."I've never worked so hard in my life", said Gina Langton, an Arena usher²¹. " This is a great atmosphere for hockey", stated John Wartenbe of Toronto, Canada²². The pinnacle was one of the fans favorite as you could take shots on virtual reality goalies such as Patrick Roy of the Colorado Avalanche and Ron Hextall of the Philadelphia Flyers. There were many other things that came along with the all-star game that we may never see again for many years.

Sharks merchandise is a widespread industry."I was shocked, while I was visiting Madrid, Spain, last summer I saw a street vendor selling Sharks shirts and hats," said avid hockey fan Clarice Bellinger²³. The Shark's overall appeal to

hockey fans and non-hockey fans surprising is not suprising since when choosing a name they chose something that everyone could relate to and knew of. The Sharks also led the National Hockey League into a new era with very vibrant and exciting jerseys. Since the Sharks entered the League a few other teams have changed their uniforms and in the 1996-97 season the National Hockey League has issued teams the rights to make a third jersey. Overall the third jerseys have been a major success along with the Shark's jerseys and the few other teams that have gone away from the traditional dull jerseys." It's interesting to see all these new jerseys that are more exiting than ever. I like how some of the older teams now have new jerseys instead of the old boring ones like Detroit," said season ticket holder Matt Clark²⁴.

The Ice Center in San Jose is now the practice facilities to the Sharks and a variety of junior hockey leagues, but not only do kids have their hockey leagues at the Ice Center. There are some adult leagues as well Hockey has become a favorite pastime and more and more people are learning how to skate and play hockey. There is no shortage of hockey in San Jose now with the sport of roller hockey becoming a favorite sport of kids. Ex-Sharks have opened up Rollin Ice were there are many different brackets and skill levels for everyone. With the San Jose rhinos coming to town the Arena now hosts hockey all year round, and there are now young people playing hockey all year round.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the San Jose Sharks have made the city of San Jose an all around better place. Now, not only is it known for being part of the Silicon Valley but also for being home to one of the most popular professional sport teams in the world. The once-failing Pavilion in downtown San Jose was saved by the night life before and after Sharks games. Many merchants believe that the Sharks might have saved downtown San Jose. Also, many former Sharks do not remember playing for a team that was so loved. Although they weren't Stanley Cup Champions, they were treated like one.

The Sharks have become one of the main topics in San Jose these days. Wherever you go you hear about the Sharks. Kids like to go to Sharks game, and in reward the Sharks like to go to visit kids schools.

END NOTES

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2. Catherine Jean Voip. (San Jose Resident)
3. Cameron, Op. Cit., p. 34.
4. Ibid., p. 32.
5. Matt Clark. (San Jose Shark season ticket holder)
6. Ibid.
7. Michael Giordano. (San Jose Shark season ticket holder)
8. Sharks Magazine Vol 1. (San Jose, Ca., Expressions Unlimited., 1993)
9. Sharks Magazine Vol 3. (San Jose, Ca., Expressions Unlimited., 1995)
10. Almost A Miracle (San Jose, Ca., Mercury News., 1994)
11. Cameron, Op. Cit., p. 15.
12. Almost A Miracle, p. 48.
13. Ibid, p. 48.
14. Cameron, Op. Cit., p. 16.
15. Ibid. p. 50.
16. Ibid. p. 151.

17. Ibid. p. 4.
18. Ibid. p. 36.
19. Sharks Magazine Vol 1. p. 40.
20. Sharks Magazine Vol 3. p. 16.
21. Gina Langton. (Arena Usher)
22. John Wartenbe. (All-Star game visitor)
23. Clarice Bellinger. (Waitress who traveled to Madrid)
24. Matt Clark. (Season Ticket Holder)

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