

Coolen: 'Giants are a barometer for Flyers'

Tom Coolen believes the Challenge Cup clash on Saturday with last season's Grand Slam winners Belfast Giants is a measuring stick as to where his men are in their preparations for the season.

Canada-born Coolen (pictured in midweek training by *Nigel Duncan*) would like to come away with a successful game on Saturday (19.15, Fife Ice Arena) when the Kirkcaldy club, the oldest in Britain, celebrate their 85th anniversary, and said: "A win would be tremendous but, again, we want to see how we fit. It is a big challenge for us."

And the man from Nova Scotia revealed that he went into the Continental Cup with one of his former teams against Belfast and his report card on Flyers so far reads: "We played Dundee in a pre-season double-header and that went pretty well, they played Glasgow Clan back-to-back in the Challenge Cup and he added: "I have to say that went pretty well too."

The coach acknowledged that his men will show high intensity and speed this term, two solid attributes, he said, for any team, but the 69-year-old added: "Looking at our personnel, speed is one thing that we will have this season."

And Coolen, who was once assistant coach to the Polish national ice hockey team, added: "The key is to train as you play. Every time we do a drill I expect them to give game

speed.”

Looking back, the Canadian recalled that in 1996 he was a coach in the American Hockey League and had leave of absence from his college job to work with the Calgary Flames. He said: “We were in the Calder Cup play-offs for the American Hockey League championship and the coach of the Portland team, who was the coach in Washington when they won the Stanley Cup, invited me into his room.

“I walked into the dressing-room and there was a big sign over the door. It said: ‘Work hard and like it’. I called my guys in after training this week and that was my word of the day.

“We work hard and we come here for a reason. We want to get better and we want to get in shape but they had better learn to work hard and like it.”

Coolen said: “I believe guys come to the rink and they are more satisfied when they leave if they feel somewhat fatigued because they have done something out there. When we come in here we work hard.”

The playcaller said the job of producing a team from scratch at Fife was an interesting one as he brought 16 new players to the club. He said: “That is been a real challenge, but you have to know the market and that is what I did all summer.”

Coolen was working to strict cash parameters and does not have the biggest budget in the Elite League but it was interesting to note that two unnamed players who lined-up for Glasgow last Saturday had been made offers to come to Kirkcaldy.

Players he has recruited all seem to be having a good time in Fife said the coach and Coolen added: “I find, more than not, it is the environment which appeals to players and the guys like it here. They are on the coast, they are playing the game that they love.”

He has undoubtedly made an impact with the Kirkcaldy public as

Coolen is being recognised in the street and he said: "My wife and I went into Costco coffee and a women was coming out and said: "Great game on Sunday, keep working at it.'

"She is a fan. In the gym, people recognise me, and it is all about sales. You want to put a good team on the ice, you want to get the fans involved, and they need to be involved, and what can be better than being successful, but you have to give them a product.

"Do that and you get sponsorship and fans in and that pays the bills. It also pays for attractions to get players and it makes everything a bit easier."