

Say What, Sean?

Written by Russ Miller

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Sean Avery. NHL's 'biggest a-hole' or 'misunderstood mucker'? Hollywood celebrities certainly see something in the NHL's resident bad boy, as he has been romantically linked to Rachel Hunter, Elisha Cuthbert and most recently Mary-Kate Olsen.

A quick look back at some Sean Avery moments:

Following a Denis Gauthier hit on then team mate Jeremy Roenick, "I think it was typical of most French guys in our league with a visor on, running around and playing tough and not back anything up."

After that there was an alleged racial slur against Georges Laraque, then with the Oilers.

Then came a nasty verbal exchange in the dressing room between Avery and former NHL goaltender turned broadcaster, Brian Hayward.

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Avery was even suspended by his own team (L.A. Kings) for the last three games of the 2005-06 season after a run in with assistant coach Mark Hardy during a practice.

Last February, Avery was traded from Los Angeles to the Rangers. He fit in right away with his new team. The Rangers went 17-6-6 after the deal, with Avery scoring 20 points in 29 games.

When he's on his game, Avery can be a very effective tool (pardon the pun). He's a decent skater, has a nice shot and makes some pretty good plays when he's not in the penalty box. He excels in sucking the opposition into taking foolish retaliatory penalties.

Look no further than last year's playoff series against the Thrashers. He effectively neutralized Kovalchuk, eventually goading the superstar into taking 17 minutes in penalties, including a fighting major in game three.

Against the Sabres, Avery was a non-factor (zero points, minus-5) at best and at worst a source of motivation for the opposition.

It seems the best way to counteract this s.o.b. is to ignore him, just like your Mom told you to do with people who call you names. NHL players must have thicker skins than the average person, they are after all, public figures.

He was cited by the Rangers during the arbitration process as "a reasonably effective player as well as a detriment to the team." They went on to say, "Avery is not a mature player. He plays, at times, like an individual rather than a member of a team."

In a 2007 poll of 283 NHL players, 66.4% said Avery was the most hated NHL player in the league. No word on whether Avery voted for himself or not.

Now we come to the Toronto game that has many people talking about whether or not Avery made some ill-mannered comments regarding Jason Blake's medical condition.

Here's what Avery had to say about the accusation, "I am extremely upset and hurt that false and damaging comments were attributed to me regarding Jason Blake. I made no such comments. I have lost two grandfathers to cancer..."

Avery was fined by the NHL, the maximum allowable of \$2,500 for his second pre-game incident (not for the alleged Blake comments) in less than a week. No word on whether that was in Canadian or U.S. dollars. Let's put the fine into perspective. If you were making \$50,000 a year, the equivalent amount would be \$65.79. That's little more than a parking ticket. Wow, now there's some incentive to cut out the antics.

Tucker was fined \$1000 for his role in the altercation or the equivalent of \$16.67 for those of us making \$50,000 per year. Once again, the NHL hits them where it hurts, in the change purse.

The NHL will likely take a serious look at having an official present during the pre-game warm ups to prevent further incidents of this kind.

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I give Avery a lot of credit. He's a 5'10" 195 pound undrafted player whose consecutive point totals in the NHL are 4, 15, 28, 39 and 48.

Is it just a coincidence that in the seven games Avery has played since coming back from his shoulder injury, Scott Gomez has 10 points and is on a eight-game point streak?

The problem with Avery seems to be that he doesn't know when to stop (shut up). He's worn out his welcome in Detroit and Los Angeles and will no doubt do the same in New York. Until he figures out how to play on the edge without going over, he's destined to repeat this pattern. If only Avery could show some maturity and stop making headlines for all the wrong reasons, he could be a real asset to a team, instead of just an ass.

I absolutely love having guys like Tucker and Avery around. They stir the pot. There are so many boring NHL players out there; it's refreshing to have actual personalities, even if they fall on the side of the "bad guys". Hockey is much more exciting with players of his ilk in the game.

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