

Jerry York creates hockey power at alma mater Boston College



Boston College coach Jerry York, 63, has won 814 career games -- second best all-time.

By Kevin Armstrong, SI.com

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass. -- Everything is in order.

The players: a Peter Pan bus full of Boston College Eagles with shaven faces, trimmed hair and neat-looking suits. Coach **Jerry York's** Mister Rogers attire: dress shirt, tie, sweater, sports jacket and polished dress shoes. The bus ride: 3.7 miles and a left turn over the Commonwealth Avenue T tracks into enemy territory.

Sitting on the edge of his front-row seat with a spiral notebook on his left knee and a sharpened No. 2 pencil in his right hand, York, Boston College's 800-game winner, is ready for another test. Tonight's opponent is his alma mater's bitterest rival, Boston University, coached by York's counterpart in legend, **Jack Parker**. It's the first Friday in December and the second-winningest coach in college hockey history has been here before. But to read his bright blue eyes, the road ahead is a fresh sheet of ice.

"It's gonna be electric," York, a three-time national champion, says as he bounds off the bus. "It's a great day to play hockey."

In this, his 37th season as a head coach York is the modern-day "Badger" Bob Johnson. The 63-year-old 's heels rarely touch the floor as he makes his way to the visitors' locker room. He stretches both legs and loosens his hips like a player prepping to enter on the next shift. With the pre-game clock counting down, his reigning national champs line up in a row -- numerically (of course) except for the two goalies in the front -- as his teams have since the early '70s. The Eagles march under the stands and onto the ice, but something's missing. Where are those welcoming words from the Terriers faithful? York hears them now.

BC sucks! BC sucks! BC sucks!

Along the blue line, each Eagle -- draped in maroon and gold -- stands with his stick in his right hand and helmet under his left arm. When the national anthem concludes, they're motionless. "Around the NHL, you'll see former Eagles in that perfectly straight posture," says onetime BC captain **Ryan Shannon**, a 2007 Stanley Cup winner with the Anaheim Mighty Ducks.

Story Highlights

Boston College coach Jerry York has 814 wins -- second only to retired Ron Mason

He has led the Eagles to eight Frozen Four appearances in the last 11 years

He was an All-America at BC and skated against the Red Army with Team USA

A reflection of York's work can be seen across hockey's frozen surfaces. Since being appointed the nation's youngest coach in 1972 at age 26, he has collected wins at Clarkson (125), Bowling Green (342) and for the last 15 years in Chestnut Hill (347), for a total of 814 - 110 behind all-time leader **Ron Mason**. York will have a chance to add to his number on Monday when BC plays Harvard in the consolation game of the 57th annual Beanpot Tournament at TD Banknorth Garden. (As player and coach, York has been a part of five Beanpot champions.)

Among his 33 first team All-Americans, he has produced a hat trick of winners of the Hobey Baker Award -- hockey's Heisman -- and bagged a matching trio of national titles, the first coming in 1984 with Bowling Green at Lake Placid, N.Y. Watching the Falcons beat Minnesota-Duluth on television from a hotel room in an NHL city, **George McPhee**, a Baker winner under York the year before, saw former teammates celebrate and his understated coach step to the side. Most of the people in the photos were jumping for joy, notes McPhee, now the Washington Capitals general manager. He adds, "Out of the frame was the best man."

On this night in Boston, after all the slashing, hooking, cross-checking and boarding, the game ends in a 1-1 tie. In a quiet moment, York leaves the press room as Parker enters. "The rivalry's at its height," says York, who has 15 more career wins than the man who has coached the Terriers since 1973.

Balding, bespectacled and typically barking, Parker, who is 106 days older than York, quips, "They should just throw down the puck with us two on the ice."

York's lips curl into a smile, his cheeks redden and he says, "Oh, Jack."

As a boy, he was quiet. If he had a voice, friends say, they didn't know it. Born the seventh of 10 children, Jerry vied for attention in Watertown, Mass. -- a factory area with a multiethnic mix along the Charles River, only a long slap shot from Chestnut Hill. "If mom put down nine potatoes, she could watch the five boys and five girls battle," says **Billy**, the youngest child.

The family was always on call. Jerry's father, **Robert**, was a general practitioner; his mother, **Mary**, a nurse. The first floor of their yellow, three-story house doubled as an emergency room where patients were treated. Late one night when he was 12, Jerry opened the front door to find a patient with bloodied hands outside. There had been a factory accident. "We never knew who'd need help," he says.

Every Wednesday, York's father, trained by Jesuit priests for his undergraduate and medical degrees at Georgetown University, would drive his Cadillac to the Jesuits' seminary in nearby Weston. Once on the property, he would drop sons Jerry, Billy and **John** by the wooded path. From there, the father continued to the infirmary and treated ailments pro bono; the three brothers, each in middle school, walked to the pond. Wood panels, reinforced by snow banks, lined the ice. There were no painted lines, no boards; two sneakers served as goal posts. "Hockey and hot chocolate," Billy says. "It was paradise."

When winter arrived, firemen flooded the tennis courts at Victory and East Junior High Fields. Nifty with the puck, Jerry was smart, not fast. At BC High he developed but was no star. One evening after the first period of a Boston College freshman game at McHugh Forum in 1962, York met with inimitable coach **John (Snooks) Kelley**. Taking a shine to the reticent teen, Kelley invited him to walk-on. "I was happy to be wanted," York says.

By 1963, he was a playmaking center on the freshman team. That November, though, his world stood still. It was a Wednesday and York was in class when **Father George Lawlor**, a school administrator, summoned him. Worried about his grades, York steeled himself for a chiding. Once in the priest's office, he found out his father had died from a heart attack at age 68 while serving on a jury. Two days later, President **John F. Kennedy** was assassinated. "You're 18," York says. "Your world's kinda shattered."

Every teammate attended his father's wake, and York quickly returned to school. A late bloomer, he earned a scholarship after his sophomore season, and helped steer the team to a Beanpot win as a junior. Later that semester, he made his first Frozen Four appearance at Brown University's on-campus rink, with the Eagles beating BU in the semifinal, but losing the title game to Michigan Tech. "Those were simpler times," says York, an All-America as a senior. "There was an intimacy to the crowd and the venues."

After starring locally, he took his game international with Team USA. During the fall of 1967, he toured Europe before the 1968 Olympic Games in Grenoble, France. Staring down the Red Army at an outdoor rink in Dusseldorf, Germany, York eyed Soviet star **Valeri Kharlamov**, and listened to the crowds' whistling. "I was in awe," says York. He was cut from the team in the last month.

Shifting duties, York, a member of the Army reserve, reported to basic training in Fort Polk, La., then trained to be a medic at Fort Sam Houston. Once finished with his active duty, he was accepted to law school, but instead worked two years as Kelley's graduate assistant, earning a guidance counselor degree while coaching the freshmen. Clarkson coach **Len Ceglarski**, a BC alumnus, called one day, inquiring whether Kelley had any candidates to be his assistant. Kelley recommended York. Recently engaged, York had to pitch his first recruit, **Bobbie O'Brien** from West Roxbury, on the virtues of Potsdam, N.Y. "It was a tough sell," York says of his wife of 39 years and the mother of their two grown children, "but she committed."

What makes a coach successful? Is it the wins? The Christmas cards from former players? The statues built on campus? "I learned early: Good players make good coaches," says York. "My power play was a lot better with **Dave Taylor**."

For Taylor, out of Levack, Ontario and his first must-have recruit, York made a commitment to Taylor's father, a worker in the coal mines, that he would see Dave through college. Two hundred fifty-one career points later, Taylor was an all-time Clarkson legend and York was on his way, too. Pumping a pipeline to Canadian ponds, York drained enough talent to win games, then moved on to Bowling Green. There, he replaced Mason and fused his New England connections to a Midwest work ethic. Each time the BC coaching position opened up, though, he applied but was overlooked until 1994 when former NHL player and coach **Mike Milbury** decided he couldn't work with the scholarship-strapped program and resigned 62 days after taking the position. (Milbury never signed his \$1 million contract.). Finally, York got the call. "He had to get it eventually," Bobbie says.

Since returning, York has uplifted the program from the depths of an early '90s tailspin. In the last 11 years, his teams have reached eight Frozen Fours and played in six Finals. "The run is **John Wooden**-like now," says **Jim Logue**, volunteer goalies coach who roomed with York during the Olympic trials. From 1998 to 2000, behind linchpin recruits like **Marty Reasoner** from Rochester, N.Y., York reached the national semis each season -- and lost. With BC in danger of becoming the Buffalo Bills of college hockey, the breakthrough came in Albany, N.Y. on a snowy night in 2001, when the Eagles beat North Dakota 3-2 in overtime to give the school its first title since 1949.

The good cheer dissipated in June 2005 when **Dr. Stephen Ranere**, York's physician, spotted an abnormality in a blood test and detected prostate cancer. Bobbie peeled through books and long-time assistant **Mike Cavanaugh** researched the disease as well. For the eternally ebullient coach, there were dark days, including when his prostate was removed at Mass General Hospital. "It's a small hockey coaches fraternity and we all wished him the best recovery," said Mason, who retired as a coach in 2002.

Cancer didn't alter York's consistency. He is not his players' best friend, but neither is he aloof. He welcomes them into his home and introduces them to his family. But discipline comes first. Under his direction, all buses leave on time as McPhee and others have learned. Facial hair is forbidden, and in lieu of cursing, York prefers to shout "cripes!" "Especially when his golf ball's in the water," says New Jersey Devils defenseman **Mike Mottau**, the 2000 Hobey Baker Award winner.

All the while, York has kept a clean house. During his early years at BC, he sat nine players for a winnable game against Providence because they violated a rule against entering Mary Ann's -- the school's popular watering hole. "Rules are rules," says Devils forward and former BC captain **Brian Gionta**. "You never have to wonder where you stand."

Last season's top defenseman, **Brett Motherwell**, and forward **Brian O'Hanley** -- two key cogs in the fast-moving machine -- were suspended for breaking a team rule after the opener. Soon, they were dismissed. "We never even knew what rule they broke," says **Nathan Gerbe**, the team's star forward.

And York doesn't mince words, as evidenced one day last January when he informed the Eagles in no uncertain terms what he thought of them. Following a lackluster weekend in Orono, Maine, against the Black Bears, the Eagles retreated to their hotel for the postgame

meal. York, turning red as a lobster, vented. "That was as angry as I've seen him," said **Father Tony Penna**, the team's chaplain, who has been around the program for 13 years.

In closing, York, who had suffered title-game losses the two previous seasons (one defeat ending when a BC shot hit the post against Wisconsin), said, "I have to go to the Final Four as a coach. My wife and I already have plane tickets, but I don't like going without a team."

The Eagles got the message. They did not clinch home ice in the Hockey East playoffs until their final regular season win over Northeastern, but from that point on, they did not lose, as Gerbe lit up the scoreboards and freshman goaltender **John Muse** stood on his red head. "We accompanied him to Denver as requested," Gerbe says.

The morning after BC's 4-1 victory over Notre Dame in the championship game, with the sun rising over the Rockies and the team's bus en route to the airport, senior captain **Mike Brennan** said, "It's a shame that it has to end."

"When you're a national champ," York said, "it never ends."

The priest thought it was an apparition.

It was during the Frozen Four last April, and several former patients of York's father, relocated to Kingston, Jamaica, to carry out their Jesuit missions, were watching a satellite telecast of the BC-Notre Dame final. Noting a camera shot of the Eagles' coach, one exclaimed, "That's Dr. York! A miracle!"

Truly his father's son, York is home again, living less than a mile from his childhood residence. Driving around his old skating grounds in his black Navigator two days after Christmas, he points to the stanchions on the tennis courts that he had to maneuver around as a youth. "I think that Gore fella was right about global warming," says York, noting that there seem to be fewer "hockey weather" days. "Maybe there'll be some glacial event and we can get back to [outdoor] hockey."

Three weeks ago, York brought his team to the Larz Anderson outdoor rink in Brookline, which provides a vista of the city's skyline. It was a mild, overcast day, beautiful for hockey, and there he was, his breath billowing into the chilly New England air. "It's a frozen Field of Dreams," he said.

Next Monday, he again will lead his team, indoors at the TD Banknorth Garden for the Beanpot consolation game. Both for its parochial nature (it involves BC, BU, Harvard and Northeastern) and perennial scheduling on the first two Mondays of February, York likes to instill in his squad the meaning of the event. On Tuesday, as he does every year, he had his seven seniors each read three-to-four pages of **Spencer Johnson's** *The Precious Present*, a tale about a child finding the joy of life in a fast-paced world, out loud to teammates. The players and coaches, hair trimmed and faces clean, gathered in the coaches' lounge area off York's office and discussed the value of staying in the present. "Guys will think ahead to Beanpots and playoff games," York says. "This focuses them. There's an order to winning."

"You can never stop coaching."