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KIRBY SCHLEGEL HAS HAD A PASSION FOR HOCKEY since he was a three-year-old growing up in Canada, a place where hockey is more of a religion than a sport. Fast forward 22 years later, when he and his father Bob Schlegel are standing in an almost-completed hockey arena in Frisco, Texas, announcing their team to the world with the likes of Mike Modano and the Dallas Stars in their corner rooting them on like a heavyweight contender. Well, that contender has now just become the champ. In less than two years since the arrival of the Texas Tornado in Frisco, the junior hockey world, sports fans, and the surrounding community are now marveling at how a 26-year-old young entrepreneur took a new junior hockey team, and built a successful franchise, both on and off the ice.

"It started by keeping the right guy on as head coach and general manager," says Kirby Schlegel, the owner and president of the 2004 USA Hockey National Champion Texas Tornado. "Tony (Curtale) had been around since the beginning of the Texas Tornado in North Richland Hills back in 1999, and with the winning program he had established, it was a 'no-brainer' to keep him as head coach and general manager heading into our first season in Frisco. Tony really knows the game and knows the business, so his knowledge in both areas is vital to our success." The success of the first season was punctuated with great crowds and a season in which the Tornado won 71 of their 80 overall games, an unprecedented record in

United States junior hockey history. Winning became such a trend for the Texas Tornado that fans lined-up for games at the Dr Pepper StarCenter in Frisco just to see the team win. "It certainly helped establish the Tornado



Kirby Schlegel, owner of the Texas Tornado hockey team. photo by Tiffany Cochran

Operation Success; Young Texas Tornado Owner Doing It Right

By Alex Kyriacs

as a business success, because the team was so successful on the ice," says Schlegel. "Fans would know that no matter who we played, more than likely we were going to win and it was going to be exciting, so that helped create an atmosphere of success for us right off the bat."

The next was to provide the "extras" for fans. "Beyond the hockey, what we wanted to do is provide the best entertainment possible for fans that they could afford," explains Schlegel. "Everything from our Tornado

jumbotron video-replay scoreboard, to the Frisco Medical Center Blimp flying around dropping prizes, to mini-mite youth teams skating during intermissions; we want to provide something for everyone when they come to a Tornado game." Along with the fast-paced hockey action, Schlegel's implementation of such programs helps create an atmosphere that entire families can enjoy. As more and more people started filling the seats, Schlegel and the rest of the Tornado staff came up with more and more ideas to cater to all those people. The Tornado started a Kids Zone, a place for kids at Tornado games to participate in interactive activities such as the giant, blow-up Tornado shooting cage. The Tornado also developed creative promotions for each home game that would give back to the fans. Promotions included Junior Jersey Night and Park Place Hat Night. All Tornado promotions combine a major sponsor and Schlegel agrees that part of the Tornado success is the involvement of so

many generous sponsors. "Sponsors are a big part of the overall puzzle for our success and they really keep things ticking for us," says Schlegel. "We provide a great target market and they get a unique way to advertise and promote their product, so it works out well for both parties."

Schlegel and the Texas Tornado have now made their hockey games the place to be for North Dallas residents when it comes to sports and family entertainment. Entering February, the Tornado is still in first place trying to defend their title, but just as important are the crowds that have turned out in record numbers. The Texas Tornado leads the 19-team North American Hockey League in attendance, a reflection of even bigger crowds this season than last. "The support this season has been great," says Schlegel. "We truly have a home ice advantage because our fans are committed to this team. We all would like to see a repeat of the National Championship and we are doing everything we can on and off the ice to make that happen for our players and our fans."

Looking to the future, the success of the Texas Tornado is a big reason why Schlegel has now taken his ownership interests to the next level with the Iowa Stars, the new AAA affiliate of



Joanne Liou, merchandiser at Dr. Pepper StarCenter
photo by Tiffany Cochran

the Dallas Stars, which will begin play during the 2005-06 season in Des Moines. Schlegel is now the owner of the new American Hockey League team that will play out of the new 15,000-seat Wells Fargo Arena, and he couldn't

"We truly have a home ice advantage because our fans are committed to this team. We all would like to see a repeat of the National Championship..."

be more excited. "The Tornado began our interests and now the next step is in transition with the Iowa Stars. The Iowa Stars are in a similar situation that the Tornado was in two years ago, with a new building and developing a new fan base, so we are very excited to be going through this process again of introducing a community to quality hockey and family entertainment."

Alex Kyrias is the Director, Communications/Play-By-Play Voice of the Texas Tornado.



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