

Keith Allen

When fans of the old Seattle Totems think about coaches, there is only one name that comes to mind: Keith Allen. Before coming to Seattle in the fall of 1956, the stocky defenseman had already played 11 seasons as a pro, spending most of his time in the American Hockey League. He also spent parts of two seasons with Detroit in the NHL, winning a Stanley Cup in 1954.

Allen was brought to Seattle as the playing coach (and general manager) of the Americans for the 1956-57 season. The club was coming off of its second consecutive last place finish, and new owner Bill Veneman knew he had to put a winning team on the ice if he wanted to get fans in the Arena. The Americans made a quick turn-around under their new coach, going from worst to first and topping the WHL Coast Division with a 36-28-6 record. Though they lost in the opening round of the playoffs to New Westminster, the fans were excited to see winning hockey again. Allen hung up his skates for good following that season and concentrated solely on his management duties. It was the beginning of what would become the most successful era of hockey in Seattle both at the gate and on the ice.

Allen used his contacts within the Red Wings organization to set up a working relationship with Detroit that gave the Americans access to minor leaguers in their farm system. Among the players who came to Seattle via this arrangement were Bill MacFarland, Les Hunt, Gerry Leonard and Marc Boileau, all of who were significant contributors to the Totems WHL Championship in 1959.

Known for being very soft spoken, Allen treated his players with respect. He didn't criticize them in the press and always had something positive to say. When he stepped down as coach in 1965 he was replaced by Bobby Kromm, a relentless task-master who was openly and publicly critical of his players. The veteran squad had a difficult time making the transition and suffered only their second losing record in 10 years, missing the playoffs.

Over the course of nine seasons behind the bench (1956-65) Allen compiled an impressive 319-270-41 record, leading the franchise to the WHL Finals three times and winning the title in 1959. He was named the *Hockey News* Minor League Executive of the Year for 1959-60 and was selected to coach in the WHL All-Star game three times. Following the 1964-65 season Allen stepped down as coach of the Totems, but remained with the franchise as general manager. He left the organization in the summer of 1966 to join the expansion Philadelphia Flyers, who were scheduled to begin play in the NHL the following season. Allen had a very successful career in Philadelphia as a coach and general manager, and remains with the club today as executive vice president. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1992 in the Builder category for his contributions to the game.

Keith Allen ranks as one of the greatest coaches in Seattle hockey history. His 319 wins are the most ever in the city, and the teams that he built in the 1960s went on to win back-to-back league championships following his departure. Under his leadership hockey in Seattle had its most successful era, and a generation of fans remember his contributions to this day.

Jeff Obermeyer is a 13-year season ticket holder with the Thunderbirds. His new book, "Hockey in Seattle", chronicles the history of hockey in Seattle from 1915 to the present day. It is available at the souvenir stands or through his website at <http://www.seattlehockey.net>.