

BURN THE BOATS

MAD MEN

While BU's inability to adapt to Vermont's neutral-zone trap frustrated Parker, getting swept at home by the Catamounts absolutely incensed Matt Gilroy. Afterwards, the Terrier defenseman vented to assistant captain Brian Strait. "We were both really pissed off," Strait recalls. "We knew we were a lot better than that, and the effort that we gave and the carelessness... It just wasn't like us. I remember he stormed up to my room, fuming, right after the game on Saturday, and he said, 'I can't believe this. Coach is letting this happen: He didn't yell enough.'

"And I was saying, 'Calm down: It's the beginning of the season.' The next day we, the captains, went up to Coach and said, 'It's not going to happen again. We might lose another one — definitely we're not losing two in a row — but we're going to make sure that we're not going to play like that again.'

"And Coach was kind of the same way [as me]: 'Don't worry about it; it's the beginning of the season.' And we said, 'Look, we're just making sure you know that that's not going to happen again. It's unacceptable, and if anything like that ever happens again, you have all the right in the world to blow up at us.' But it didn't ever happen again. We lost a couple of games. Those were our third and fourth losses, that early in the season, and the whole rest of the season we only lost two more."

Yet the doldrums continued in the short term. Next up was a game against Atlantic Hockey rival Holy Cross. The coaches decided to bench Nick Bonino, who had cooled off dramatically after his torrid start. Taking away ice time by making a player a healthy scratch is often the m.o. to put the whole team on notice. After all, it's sometimes impossible to bench *every* player who may deserve to sit.

"That not only gets Bonino's attention, but it makes the rest of the boys say 'He benched Bonino? Well, I could be benched pretty quickly, too,'" Parker says. "Those types of things can help guys. It's happened to a whole bunch of

sophomores, forever. He got off to a great start. The puck was jumping in the net for him. Then he stopped scoring and started pressing, then he started thinking about scoring goals. When you're playing hockey and you start worrying about scoring goals, you *suck* at every other aspect of the game, and then you never get the puck and you never score the goal. He went the route that many great players have gone."

Parker refuted the notion that scratching a highly talented player is always his call; he told me that it could be any of the coaching staff making the case. "One of us would step up and say, 'What are we accepting here?' This kid is supposed to be a ten-beller, and we're accepting eight bells from him. Our staff has the ability to say, 'Don't get fooled by this; don't accept mediocrity.' Nick was not *trying* to be mediocre. He was just out trying to do what he's supposed to do for our team but going about it the wrong way, and he just didn't get it until we had to sit him down and said, 'That's enough, Nick.' Then he was pissed, but he realized, 'It must be pretty bad if they're benching me.'"

Playing without Bonino, BU went out against the Crusaders and emerged with their least inspiring victory of the whole season, a 3-2 decision that was in doubt till the final buzzer. After getting out to a 2-0 lead, the home team just about called it a night. For the first time all season, Parker reamed out his club between periods. "I remember it probably took the first 10 or 12 games before Coach came in the locker room and screamed at us to pick it up," Jason Lawrence remembers. "Coach hadn't come in and yelled us up to that point. So he yells at us, then he walks out, walks back in, and says, 'I really haven't had to yell at you guys for 12 games—that's amazing. I'm sorry about this...'"

Lawrence got called for slashing in the last minute, giving Holy Cross a better chance to tie the game. The senior would be benched for the subsequent game with

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St. Lawrence as a result, but fingers could be pointed at any number of culprits, afterward. "In general, with the exception of a few guys, it was a pathetic performance by my team," Parker said at the press conference. "You've got to give Holy Cross credit for coming in and playing hard and saying 'Holy Jesus! This is BU? We can play with these guys... We can *more* than play with these guys.' And they did."

Escaping with a narrow win over an Atlantic Hockey opponent with a record around .500 and a ton of freshmen and sophomores in the lineup, Parker expressed more doubt about his team than at any time previously or subsequently during the season. "I think we fell into a trap of thinking we were better than we were and now we're in the trap of worrying about if we're as good as we ever were or as good as we can be," Parker said in the press conference. "We're so far away from where we were the first five or six game in terms of decision making and effort and skating. I thought Holy Cross looked quicker than we did.

"We're at the point where we're not sure if we're any good at all."

For his part, Matt Gilroy was mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. Taking matters into his own hands, Gilroy managed to earn the wrath of his coach at the next practice. "He refused to practice hard," Parker says. "It wasn't anything verbal he was doing. He was coasting through drills, and I made him do one again. So he did it even slower. There were some words said on the ice but most of it was his body language, and I finally said, 'Hey, screw.'"

Parker followed his co-captain into the locker room and gave him a tongue-lashing that harkened back to his earlier days of high-decibel coaching. "I got him out of his dressing room and into my dressing room, and I got in his face and said, 'Who the hell do you think you are?!' I thought this guy is too big for his britches."

However, it's revealing that Parker told me this story when I asked him to elaborate on something he said repeatedly later in the year—how Gilroy actually made him a better coach. "He's never ever admitted it, but I think he got himself thrown out of practice on purpose," Parker says. "I think what he was telling me was 'You should be doing this to everyone else; you're too easy on these guys right now.'" In light of Gilroy's complaint to Strait about Parker not getting mad enough with the team, it seems extremely likely that the altercation was a deliberate ploy on Gilroy's part.

Gilroy never mentioned the practice incident to me and instead credited his coach for the subsequent turnaround. "It wasn't talent; we just got outworked. And if you know Coach Parker, that's one thing he'll go crazy about. We got screamed at that week. 'How could you come here and let a team take two games from you in your own building? You're playing a team that prides itself on working hard. They say they know they can beat BU because they can outwork them. They come out and out-compete you: How can you just sit there and take it?' I know it woke up me and some of the older guys, and we said, 'We're not going to get outworked again.' And we realized that when we outwork teams, there's no team that can beat us."

SMOLDERING BOATS

The team bounced back with a satisfying 4-1 win against St. Lawrence over Thanksgiving weekend. Parker came into the press conference in high spirits, chuckling over his conversation with Saints' coach Joe Marsh, one of the funniest guys in college hockey. On a more serious note, though, Marsh described the game as "men against boys." It was a game that marked Bonino getting back in the lineup—centering McCarthy and Yip again—and it also showed signs of McCarthy realizing his offensive potential, picking up two assists.