

# #CanBall Weekly: Jay Triano loving life and ready for the long haul with men's national team

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By Israel Fehr

1/27/2016

PORTLAND, Ore. – Jay Triano has been in the basketball coaching game for a long time, with over 25 years of coaching experience at the college, professional, and international level.

"This is 20 years in the NBA for me – if you count my Vancouver years, which I was there for all six years – I wasn't coaching but then I got into coaching. If it wasn't for the Grizzlies, I'd probably still be coaching at Simon Fraser," Triano told Yahoo Canada Sports in an interview before a Trail Blazers game in Portland in mid-January. "I've seen it from a young guy sitting behind the bench to a lead assistant to the head coach."



And after all this time he's reached his professional apex. Triano was the Raptors' head coach for over 2 1/2 seasons from 2009-11, and while he's grateful for the opportunity to be the first Canadian to serve as a head coach in the NBA, it was a tough gig and took a lot out of him.

After a year away from the bench, Triano has been the lead assistant on head coach Terry Stotts' staff in Portland since the start of the 2012-13 season, which coincided with his return as the head coach of the Canadian men's national team. It's reinvigorated his coaching career.

"I needed to get out of Toronto. And the Raptors were great to me, but I didn't want to be hanging around there after the experiences that I had. They were rebuilding and it was time for me to move on. I have a lot of respect for the organization, though, for keeping me involved so I could land somewhere else. That happened to be Portland and it's been great," said Triano.

"When you're the head coach, it's less about basketball. It's about media relations, the public relations, talking to suite holders, ticket holders, and sponsors. It's a lot different. You have to multi-task a lot.

"As an assistant, I love diving into the basketball part of it: breaking down games, watching games. Not having any other responsibilities other than helping your players get better and helping your team get better. Working with Terry has been fantastic. We get along great and we have a great staff."

The same dynamic certainly extend to his duties as head coach of Team Canada. Working alongside Steve Nash, the team's general manager, is a perfect situation for Triano, even if last summer didn't go to plan.

The crushing one-point loss to Venezuela in the FIBA Americas semifinals still stings. It cost Canada automatic qualification into the Rio 2016 Olympics and forced them into Olympic qualifying tournament this summer in Manila, where they'll have to beat five other teams to get through to the Games.

Triano hopes that the memory of coming so close, yet not finishing the job, sticks with the young Canadian players and becomes a launching point for future success.

"What happened last summer is going to be a real positive down the road. It sucks right now and it sucked back then, but it's going to be a real positive down the road because the experience we went through," said Triano.

"We were dominant throughout that whole tournament. We were one of the best analytic teams – we were No. 4 defensively, counting all the European teams and everyone that played last summer, and No. 1 offensively – we were playing at a very high rate. For it to all go sour in one game ... we had a lot of guys that didn't have good games. There's no reason for it. Maybe it's the growth; maybe it's our youth. Yeah, it hurts. But sometimes you have to go through things like that to make us better. I know our guys still have a lot of fire left over from what happened."



It would appear they do, based off their play in the NBA. Kelly Olynyk of the Celtics and the Raptors' Cory Joseph are having career-best seasons. Andrew Wiggins continues to show flashes of stardom.

Triano is in contact with Nash at least twice a month and the frequency of their conversations will increase as the summer approaches. The main talking points are about the play of the Canadian players and how to handle the upcoming tournament, but their long-term focus remains on building a program that NBA organizations see their players participating in as a benefit, not a burden.

"Every night I take a look at the box scores, if I'm not watching the game, and seeing how our guys are doing. If a guy has a good game, I'll send him a text. Kelly's having a great year. Cory's really been great. That's great for us. I don't want NBA teams thinking we're wearing their guys down," said Triano. "I want them to look at it as [those guys] came back and they're better players because of it. That's a big thing for us. We're trying to grow the program. We're trying to do the right thing. We want NBA teams to want us to have their players, not begging them to use their guys."

It's important, because should Canada win their Olympic qualifying tournament – and that'll be a challenge with France, No. 5 in the FIBA rankings, and Turkey, ranked No. 8, also vying for the one spot up for grabs in the Philippines – they'll be asking those NBA teams for their players for two tournaments.

And hopefully continuing to ask those teams for their players for years to come. Olynyk, Joseph, and Tristan Thompson are 24. Nik Stauskas is 22. Tyler Ennis is 21. Wiggins is 20. Jazz rookie Trey Lyles is 19. Jamal Murray, poised to be a top-10 pick in the 2016 NBA draft, is 18.

Between the Trail Blazers and Canada, Triano is loving life and committed for the long haul. He recognizes this summer presents a number of challenges, but also warns that it's too early to count out him and his team.

"We're still gearing up for the 2020 Olympics. That's when we're really going to be in our wheelhouse. Our players are going to be in their prime [in 2020] and getting there this year would be huge for our growth," said Triano. "But these guys are true competitors – they want this one."

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