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Sharks — and their teeth — are fortunate to have Mr. Fix-it handy

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Upon returning home from a trip last month, a line of Sharks players waited for the chance to open their mouths wide in the makeshift "office" of Dr. Don Goudy.

It's actually more like a walk-in closet, just off the Sharks' HP Pavilion training room, barely large enough to fit a dental chair.

But when you're the dentist for an NHL team, you need to be close to the action. And it's here that Goudy performs emergency repairs such as root canals — often with players urging him to hurry up

so they can return for their next shift on the ice.

The Sharks have kept Goudy busy this season. The list of dentally challenged only begins with Mike Grier, Jonathan Cheechoo, Jeremy Roenick, Devin Setoguchi and Ryane Clowe.

Asked which players have suffered teeth damage, Goudy responded: "The real question is 'Who didn't?'"

The image of the gap-toothed hockey player is overblown. But enough incisors and bicuspid get displaced to make this the Tooth Fairy's favorite sport.

"Everything is flying around out there, and that's the problem," said Sharks defenseman Rob Blake. "Pucks, sticks, elbows. Pretty much everyone in this room has lost something, so you get guys walking around here with missing teeth. It happens."

That's why a dentist plays a much bigger role in hockey than other sports ... and why Goudy is on a first-name basis with most of the team.

"Let's just say I've spent a lot of time with J.R.," he said.

A couple other points:

- 1) After visiting the Shark Tank dentist's chair, players don't get a toothbrush — they just get their hockey sticks back.
- 2) Teeth rarely end up getting tucked underneath pillows.

"Usually the tooth ends up in the Zamboni," Goudy said.

Just listening to players describe teeth getting

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knocked out can be painful.

Cheechoo spit out parts of five teeth after catching a puck earlier this season. He happily gave a tour of the carnage.

"This one didn't have much root left," Cheechoo said, pointing to an empty space. "This one here was cracked right across and didn't come out until the next day. These three down here? They were just gone. They had to pull all the little pieces out."

Then there's Patrick Marleau, who casually mentions that "maybe" he has lost two full teeth during his career.

"Half here, half there."

This is why hockey players have a reputation for toughness.

"Dealing with pain is just part of their job, and they're good at it," Goudy said. "When a guy has roots hanging out, it hurts them as much as it hurts anybody. But they're always like, 'Let's do it, doc.' "

Goudy, 43, was a Sharks fan before he was part of the medical staff. The James Lick High graduate attended San Jose State before going to dental school at Northwestern and doing his hospital residency at UCLA.

A few years ago, longtime Sharks dentist Dr. Robert Bonahoom decided to step back from his hockey work. Team trainer Ray Tufts was looking for a replacement when Marleau suggested his wife's family dentist: Goudy.

"I guess when the captain wants something, he gets it," Goudy said.

The dentist doesn't get paid. But then he no longer

pays to attend games, either.

"I've got the best gig ever," he said.

Because of health privacy laws and hockey's code of not discussing injuries, Goudy can't talk about treatment of specific players. But he estimates 75 percent of the Sharks have some sort of crown or prosthesis (replaced tooth) in the front of their mouths. This season has brought about a rash of dental-related injuries.

When a player gets hurt — and Goudy treats the visiting teams as well — the goal is to get him back on the ice quickly. Goudy uses a fast-acting anesthetic called Septocaine.

"We go through the stuff by the gallon," Goudy said. "I can freeze somebody's tooth within a minute so I can start to work. You have to get in there right away because you'll see a coach peeking around the corner wanting to know when they can go back out."

Typically, the player will be in Goudy's Bascom Avenue office early the next morning to start the permanent restoration work. Several Sharks gave Goudy rave reviews for his painless technique.

Blake always dreaded trips to the dentist. He had avoided seeing one for seven years until a physical before this season revealed fillings that needed to be replaced.

"I actually fell asleep in the chair; that's how gentle he was," Blake said.

From Gordie Howe to Bobby Orr, missing teeth have been hockey's badge of honor. The Sharks' Joe Thornton often doesn't wear the bridge that replaces the two front teeth he lost.

Mike Ricci, who has the most famous toothless grin

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in Sharks history, recounts telling his mother "no" when she tried to get him braces at age 14.

"Four months later I knocked out my first tooth," recalled Ricci, now in the team's front office. "I told my mom, 'Gee, aren't you glad you didn't buy those braces? I saved us some money.'"

But attitudes have been changing. Goudy said about 60 percent of the Sharks wear protective mouth guards. Medical advances also have cut down on the number of Jack-o'-lantern smiles.

Dentists now install implants — threaded titanium cylinders — that become part of the bone, and then screw in permanent teeth indistinguishable from real ones.

"Players used to have a mindset of 'Why replace it because it's only going to get knocked out again anyway?'" Goudy said. "I tell them that I make these breakaway teeth. If it does break again, it's not going to hurt the implant."

Ricci, though, embodies the old-school hockey attitude. He wants nothing to do with Goudy's dental chair.

"He goes on and on about what he's going to do," Ricci said. "I told him, 'Then I'm going to be sitting there for two years. Forget it.' They don't hurt. I told him to just let them fall out."

It's Goudy's turn to wince whenever he see Sharks like Thornton and Cheechoo doing interviews without teeth.

"When Joe smiles with his teeth out, I wonder if people are thinking, 'Gosh, where was the dentist that night?'" Goudy said.

Both are in the process of getting implants.

Cheechoo said he doesn't mind missing a tooth — for now, anyway. But he needs a replacement by this summer.

He's getting married.

"She said I better have one in for the pictures," he said.

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