



Coach Rex's Story ~ An Opportunity to Play

Growing up during the 1960's and 70's in a community of less than 500 people on picturesque Little Bay Island in Newfoundland, I dreamed, like most Canadian boys, of playing in the NHL. My boyhood idols were future Hall of Famers Bobby Hull and Bobby Orr.

At age 7, I laced up my first pair of hand-me-down skates, complete with four or five extra pair of socks so I could fit them better and I learned to skate by pushing a sled on the natural ice of the community's salt water harbor. A few days later, my Dad replaced the size fours with a second hand pair of snug- fitting size two Bauers and I was off to the races! I quickly gained my inside edges and began to move faster. With each stride I took, I no longer needed that heavy sled for support! Skating came naturally to me. I was somewhat gifted compared to my friends and quickly discovered that I loved to skate and fell passionately in love with skating and later with playing hockey. You could say I became a hockey fanatic who found myself in an area of the world without a rink, a minor hockey association, coaching or even money to play the game.

Little Bay Island is a small remote island 2.5 miles long by 1.5 miles wide off the Northeast Coast of Newfoundland. As the crow flies, my home town of Little Bay Island is only about a mile off the Newfoundland Coast, but it's a 45 minute ferry boat ride. For all intents and purposes this ruled out youth community hockey for my hometown - a small fishing village.

Undeterred, not having an artificial rink or a hockey coach, I continued to play shinny hockey with my pals and skated long hours every opportunity that came available on the local harbor, or the island's 5 fresh water ponds. Whenever there was a sheet of ice I was often the first person on and usually the last one off. During December and January, when the harbor ice grew to be a foot thick, the occasional winter rain would visit for a few hours until the temperature plummeted again and the storm blew through. What was left in the wake of Nature's Zamboni was my "rink of dreams"; pure glare ice for a couple of thousand feet in any direction to skate on, play shinny on, and / or practice shooting on (better be accurate because rounding up the pucks was a big job and a good skate under those circumstances).

I was a grade A student, but other than studying and doing homework, every bit of my free time during the late fall and winter months was spent out on the harbor or a nearby pond; skating, and playing shinny hockey when weather conditions allowed. Often we waited for several months without an opportunity to skate due to the bad ice conditions, so we got our hockey fix playing road hockey with a sponge puck - it seemed like we played almost every day. It was a terrible feeling when you wanted to play ice hockey each day but could not.

"Orr and Stanfield on the point, Esposito wins the draw, puck goes back to Orr on the point, Orr over to Stanfield, Stanfield back to Orr, Orr to Bucyk in the corner, Bucyk back to Orr, Orr with the shot...He scoores!" So vividly, I recall the words of Bob Wilson, radio announcer of the WBZ AM Bruin Hockey Network, I reminisce to find myself being transported to another time, as an avid young hockey fan tuned into the radio broadcasts because they brought the Bruin and Ranger games play-by-play sailing north across the cold Atlantic with crystal clarity to my eager ears. I was starving for hockey action and news.

Conversely, I can also recall my frustration over the inability, from time to time, to see the Hockey Night in Canada images being broadcast on CBC television every Saturday night because of bad weather conditions affecting the outdoor TV antenna. I recall getting as close to the TV as possible to try and make clear of the very snowy objects moving about on the screen, while listening to the audio which was generally good no matter what the video reception was like.

I always wanted to play in the NHL, and was often kidded about my determination to do

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Coach Rex (Cont'd from 4)

so by my friends. My father would often say to me, "If you don't get something involved in hockey it will be a strange thing."

However, there was no opportunity for me in this remote area of Newfoundland to play organized hockey. I played on the harbor and island ponds until I left home at the age of 17 to attend Memorial University in the City of St. John's. At the tender age of 18, I experienced my first skate on one of the city's soft artificial arena ice surfaces – quite a difference for a dedicated rural shinny hockey player used to the crisp natural outdoor ice which offers a faster and harder surface.

My goal of playing competitive university hockey quickly became unattainable. My lack of experience with organized hockey caught up to me as I skated with players who had been exposed to artificial ice and proper coaching from Minor Hockey elsewhere in the province. So I settled on playing intramural hockey and focused on graduating with a business degree. I finished my university years with one goal achieved, my degree, and one goal still unfulfilled.



My first pair of Skates - Size 4

As I grew older my life's dream to be involved in hockey remained the same, only the plans had changed. After spending 5 years in the academic and another 15 in the business world, I gave up my career in corporate financial planning, and later sales, to pursue my love of the game of hockey.

Now I find myself residing in Calgary, Alberta operating my own full time hockey business for the last 9 years and instructing hockey players on the ice over 500 times per year, teaching power skating and various hockey skills. I made that journey to a life in hockey on the road less traveled, pursuing my childhood dream, by honing my power skating, hockey skills and coaching qualifications over the past 20 years. I am grateful to be in a profession that I am passionate about. It truly is a dream come true. I see myself as an uncommon commoner.

Growing up my dad was a hard working fisherman and my mother a school teacher turned stay-at-home mom. Funds to buy hockey equipment and opportunities to play were quite limited. I recall as a child receiving parcels in the mail during the Christmas season from my beloved Aunt Doris, living in Montreal at the time. She would always ask me

what I wanted for Christmas and my reply was always the same - hockey gear. Receiving elbow, shin, and shoulder pads etc., was the highlight of my Christmas and it meant the world to me. I felt so excited to see the equipment and couldn't wait to go outside to play.

As a result of my involvement with the minor hockey system in Calgary and the success of Tucker Hockey, I created a vision to do something good in the world and develop goodwill in the hockey and business communities. Mainly with the help of my good friend Nick Radmanovich, the Kids Hockey Advancement Society, a non-profit organization, was founded in 2008 to provide disadvantaged kids with an opportunity to play. Calgary may be a very affluent city but there are still families who could use some help giving their kids an opportunity to play. For the past 3 years we have raised funds to provide children from disadvantaged families an opportunity to play sports, especially hockey.

I used to think that if I had the opportunity with an indoor rink, gear, coaching, and parents who had financial means, could I have made it somewhere with my skills, passion and drive and my tremendous love for the game? Currently, my hockey business offers me an opportunity to teach players of all ages and have fun on the ice myself at the same time. I truly enjoy the unique mix of my business and hockey lives.

With the support of the hockey and business friends I have made over the years, I hope that with our continued fundraising efforts there will be more opportunities for kids who wish to chase their dreams or just want to have fun playing. That's why I volunteer countless hours every year to help raise funds via the Kids Hockey Advancement Society's golf and poker tournaments.

Yes, I believe it's important to have an opportunity to play. These are values I cherish due to my own childhood memories.

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

~ Booker T. Washington