



Coach Rex's Story Part II

Playing Outdoor Hockey

Growing up during the 1960's and 70's in a community of less than 500 people on picturesque Little Bay Island in Newfoundland my fondest childhood memories relate to skating and playing outdoor hockey.

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. Since our small fishing village did not have an artificial rink or even an outdoor rink my friends and I played every chance we could get on the natural salt water harbor or the Island's 5 fresh water ponds.

Skating came naturally to me. I was somewhat gifted compared to my friends and quickly discovered at the age of 7 that I loved to skate. I 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 buy equipment.

When the temperatures dropped in the fall each year usually around early to mid October one of the local freshwater ponds became our childhood playground. It was a worrisome time for my loving Mother who was quite concerned about me falling in and drowning while skating on a local pond. Since I nearly drowned at the tender age of 6 while playing on the harbor shoreline, it did not help matters much! During the fall and winter season living in such a small community - where you knew everyone - word got around quite quickly about good places to skate.

Taking my skates, a stick, a puck and any hockey equipment - usually I had only gloves and shin pads - my friends, Roy, Kevin, Jerry, Dennis, Otto et al and I would head off to the local pond. We didn't have parents dedicated to dropping us off and picking us up. If we wanted to get there we had to walk. Using a small tomahawk axe, we would cut a hole in the ice to measure its thickness. Placing a hand down in the hole, if the ice measured 5 inches thick or more we were good to skate - game on! The hole in the ice would later serve as our drinking source when we got thirsty from playing.

If by chance we arrived late on the pond we could hear the voices of friends playing and the sounds of blades cutting the ice, handling the puck....such sweet sounds from hockey playing. We couldn't wait to get out on the ice and participate in the shinny game. Everyone played; kids, teenagers and even some adults - it was a mixed group and the groups varied in size each day. When playing on the pond with all the noise and activity, on many occasions the pond would make



Campbells Pond - My Childhood Arena

a loud cracking sound - this would get our attention and everyone would stop playing for a few brief moments. We would look around and quickly realize that everyone was safe - no one in the water - and carry on with our game! Often while playing hockey or skating on the pond we could see right through the ice to the bottom of the pond....see the lily pads and the occasional dead frog!

On weekends, we often arrived at 9 am in the morning and stayed and played all day. Many times we would forget to eat lunch and stagger home when it became dark with our hockey stick and skates over our shoulders. Our legs felt like rubber, buckling on the quarter mile walk home because we were so tired from playing all day. We were often very

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“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

~Graham Greene

Calgary Outdoor Hockey (Cont'd from p. 3)

sweeper in the winter that pulls a 250 gallon water tank to flood the ice. Outdoor hockey is a great way to keep teenagers away from the malls and off the streets. On weekdays there's lots of 4 – 5 year olds using the rink". There are no outdoor rink user fees but Don encourages people who use the community rink to buy a community membership... to help out the community financially. Don said "We also have an annual skills competition with a radar gun to measure participants skating speed and their shot. We also have a windup party at the end of the outdoor season for all the volunteers and spouses who are involved."

Glendale / Glendale Meadows Community and Elboya Heights Community are two examples of many in the City of Calgary where rinks were built as "a labor of love" by dedicated volunteers but have turned into a great cause for facilitating a broad range of recreational activities for all ages in the community. The outdoor rink can provide a great sense of community in the winter times!

The many outdoor rink facilities in Calgary are always looking for volunteers to help out throughout the season. Check out the website http://www.calgaryarea.com/calgary_rinks_arenas.htm if you wish to learn more or volunteer your services to a local outdoor arena. I'm sure you will develop new friendships and create many fond memories from participating in hockey - outdoors!

Editor's Note: Thanks again Don and Leo for taking the time from your busy schedules to share your thoughts and experiences about Hockey from an Outdoor Rink Perspective.



Stanley Park/Elboya Park Shinny Hockey

Coach Rex's Story (Cont'd from 4)

very weary. However, I felt such a great sense of peace from doing something all day that I loved! Although dead tired in the evening, I couldn't wait to go back next day and play.

Later in the season, during December and January, we played on the natural salt water harbor when the ice grew to be a foot thick. At times the temperatures would rise and we would have a rain storm. I would ask my Dad if the temperatures would drop – praying that they would dip so the fresh rain water on the harbors surface would freeze over. My Dad would check the weather glass on our kitchen wall and when he said it would drop I went to bed with great anticipation for a great day of skating the next day. The occasional winter rain would visit for just a few hours until the temperature plummeted again and the storm blew through. What was left in the wake of Mother Nature's Zamboni was my "rink of dreams"; pure glare ice for a couple of thousand feet in any direction to skate on, and or play shinny. Waking up in the morning and looking out my bedroom window at 6 or 7 am and seeing a beautiful glare of ice was such a wonderful feeling – it warmed my heart! Since our house was only

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*My hometown of Little Bay Island
Located off the North East coast of Newfoundland*

Coach Rex' Story (cont'd from 25)

30 feet from the ocean, it offered a big playground in our backyard. Often I played on the harbor ice in the morning 30 minutes before going to school, 30 minutes during lunchtime, an hour or so after school / before dark, have supper, do my homework and later skate at night.

On occasion the daily temperature during a freeze dropped to the -10 to -20C degree range and also factor in a little wind chill as well it was quite cold! Undeterred, we bundled up as best we could and braved the elements. However, after skating and maybe playing hockey for an hour or so many of my friends would pack it in. Often I stayed longer - out on the ice by myself. Not able to handle the elements any longer, I was forced to come in out of the cold, take my skates off and thaw out...with my feet near the warmth of the kitchen woodstove oven. I felt extreme pain when my forehead, cheeks, ears and toes began to thaw out. Tears flowed down my cheeks. After thawing out, believe it or not I still wanted to play again! I would say to my concerned parents, I'm going outside again. My parents thought I was nuts and probably maybe I was.... but I just loved to play.....the pleasure I received from skating and playing was worth the severe pain forthcoming.

Throughout the winter months the weather conditions would make our playing schedule very irregular, often going days, weeks or a month without an opportunity to play. Often the weather conditions were semi kind and our lovely skating surface would only be covered in snow. My friends and I would gather up a few shovels, plywood sheets and diligently remove the snow and create a good size playing surface for ourselves on the harbor. We placed a couple boots down at each end of the ice to create goals, throw sticks in a pile and pick teams and enthusiastically play...often challenged to find our puck when it traveled into the snow banks.

Whenever there was a sheet of ice I was often the first person on and usually the last one off. Sometimes I was the only skater on the ice – feeling a great sense of solitude and peace. Growing up materially, we were relatively poor but

we didn't really know we were poor because we were so rich and blessed in other ways. Looking back I feel fortunate to have such a care free childhood - to play, develop my skills, have fun, with no pressure from coaches or parents, just pure love and passion for playing shinny hockey. It was a simpler time in society and offered a playful childhood to grow a true love and passion for the game of hockey. Today, especially in the urban areas, fewer kids enjoy the freedom and outdoor pleasures of playing hockey on a frozen pond. For Coach Rex, it's one of my experiences in life which I have treasured – an opportunity to play outdoor hockey!



Editor's Note:

During the Heritage Classic weekend, several NHL players expressed their fond childhood outdoor hockey playing memories as well. Here's what they had to say...

Jarome Iginla, future Hockey Hall of Famer: "I loved the outdoor rink...my first time ever skating was outside. My aunt actually took me with her boyfriend the first time. Before I went

to my tryouts or anything...I was literally terrible. Hanging onto the boards... falling all over. They weren't my own skates, so that was probably part of it. The next year I got talked into playing."

Adam Pardy, fellow Newfoundlander and Calgary Flames defenseman: "We didn't have an outdoor rink....just lots of ponds. My uncle made a rink in his backyard for us... Sometimes you didn't even eat, you'd forget to. You did that all day."

Dana Murzyn, Calgary Flames '89 Stanley Cup Champion: "I remember crying in the car a number of times on the way home, your feet didn't hurt much when they were frozen, but boy, they hurt when they started to thaw out. You'd get the pins and needles. I think every Canadian has that story if they played on an outdoor rink".

"If you carry your childhood with you, you never become older."

~Tom Stoppard