



# Hockey Zones

Tucker Hockey's official newsletter—reinforcing hockey's POSITIVES to all ages!

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For the LOVE of the GAME!



Coach Rex's Corner

## What Defines A Successful Hockey Season?

By Rex Tucker

The minor hockey season has started up again. When you reflect back on this year's hockey season, what will constitute a successful season for you? Winning Provincials? Winning the City championship? Winning the Divisional title? Winning Minor Hockey Week? I trust your season will be remembered for more than just your team's win and loss column.

For individuals working in the NHL, prior to this mercenary and greedy lock-out, a successful season consisted of making the playoffs and ultimately, winning the Stanley Cup. What an incredible play-off drive by the Flames last season!

Basically, winning is everything! The stakes are so very high. Often if a team doesn't win... hockey people lose their jobs!

When looking at the minor hockey world the attitudes, priorities, and focus should be different—much different indeed! Winning is *not* everything! Everyone aspires to be a winner—no one likes to lose—but I truly feel there are so many more things which create a successful sea-

son than just winning, especially at the below-Bantam age and community-level players.

Why? The minor hockey system develops not only hockey players but young people/citizens as well. Since only a small percentage of players will go on to make a living in the sport, it is important to keep the proper perspective on the season and its end results. Hockey is the greatest sport on Earth and every child should enjoy the experience of lacing up skates and participating in a team sport. Past Hockey Canada T.V. commercials showing the "Relax, its only a Game!" philosophy were directed towards overbearing parents who place too much pressure on their kids; these commercials are priceless! The video clips on the golf course, in the supermarket, and the traffic ticket scenes have been very amusing to watch. **They convey a very important message to parents: Let your child play the game, have fun, and develop his/her hockey skills—and let the chips fall where they may!**

The main emphases should be on hockey skill development and having fun! Too many minor hockey coaches are trying to teach team tactics,

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**“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

## Successful Season (cont'd.)

positional play, and systems to their players and are “tunneled into winning” when the emphasis should be on teaching skill development i.e. skating, passing, puck control, shooting, etc... the fundamentals of the game, in other words.

Success can be measured in many many ways so here’s a little “food for thought”: Maybe it’s the Tyke player who has learned to skate from one end of the ice to the other without falling down? Maybe it’s the Novice player who can finally raise his/her wrist shot off the ice? Maybe it’s the Atom player who learned to skate backwards this season? Maybe it’s the Pee- wee player who has learned to take and give a check properly and, most importantly, safely? Maybe it’s the Bantam player who switched from playing forward to defense and now enjoys the game better from this new position on the blue line? Maybe it’s the parent who introduced a child to hockey and the kid has fallen in love with the sport? “Eh, Mom/Dad, I want to go to the rink!” Sweet music indeed!

Maybe success occurs when the rookie Assistant Coach who was a little nervous about helping out the team came out of his/her shell and truly enjoys helping the kids? Maybe it’s the Head Coach who molded the team into a very competitive unit when at the start of a season going 0 for 5 things didn’t look too promising? Maybe it’s the grandparent who decided to “free up some time” to see a grandchild play this season, saw the first game, got hooked, and didn’t miss a game all season?

Maybe it’s the younger sister who wondered what all the fuss was all about with her older hockey-playing brother so she decided to sign up for girls’ hockey and loves it? Maybe it’s the “first time” parent volunteer i.e.: score keeper, time keeper, fund-raiser who now loves the game atmosphere and the social environment around the hockey rink? Maybe it’s the first-time volunteer minor hockey Administrator who has a better appreciation of the thankless time and energy volunteer administrators, coaches, and parents put into our game?

Maybe you can think of a few more ways

to define a successful season? I know you can add to the list! **Basically you define your own success.**

When looking back at the hockey season, many things will come to mind, on and off the ice. While no season will be perfect, I trust there will be more good memories/thoughts than bad about your participation in the greatest sport on Earth.

Reflecting on my own minor hockey experiences, my last season behind the bench in Calgary was in 1995. Even though my team made tremendous progress from the previous year, we fell short of making the playoffs by three points. At the end of the season, I won the “Coach of the Year” award in the Calgary Junior Hockey League but this award was not the most satisfying nor most memorable part of my season; instead, two other events stand out.

The first happened in the middle of the season when our team won a game without a goalie! Yes, a very strange and exciting event! My number one goalie, Kyle, had to work and I couldn’t recruit another goalie from my Midget “AAA” or Midget “AA” affiliate list. So my back-up goalie, Scottie, was the lone goalie on my game sheet. At 6:45 p.m. no Scottie. Where’s Scottie? I went to a pay phone and called him. Scottie thought the game started at 9 p.m. but it was a 7 p.m. start! We didn’t have a goalie for the start of the game so what to do?

I decided to start the game without a goalie and wait until Scottie arrived, better late than never. I developed a game plan to play “keep away” when we had the puck and play “pressure on the puck” when the opposition had it. We created an “I” formation with two forwards in the neutral zone; they were instructed not to skate past the center line unless we had the puck; we had three players lined up across our blue line and one player guarding our net zone.

We managed to escape after the first period down only 2 to 1! Scottie arrived for the start of the second period, and we went on to win the game 6 to 3. It was quite a thrilling and exciting game! What a joyous atmosphere in the dressing room after the game. We could have easily

folded our tent and given up and forfeited the game but we pulled it together as a team! ...Fond memories indeed!



Off the ice my best memory relates to a phone call I received during the off season, from one of my players. Troy had called to find out if I would be coaching the team for the upcoming season. With a very heavy heart, I had to tell him no; because of uncertainty with my work situation I could not commit to coaching the team.

Troy was the last player I placed on my roster during the previous season. He often got down on himself because he wasn’t scoring but I told him I didn’t care if he scored all season as long as he worked hard and played good two-way hockey! He only scored one goal all season.

Troy was a player who had difficulty with his school work throughout the season and would often call me to ask if he could skip practice to study for an exam. I would tell him there was no problem—just give me your “A” game next time we play! When Troy learned that I would not be coaching he said: “Rex, last season was the most enjoyable year I have ever had in my 12 years of playing hockey! I learned so much and had so much fun!” Thanks again for everything!”

Those words from an 18-year-old hockey player were much more gratifying to me than winning the “Coach of the Year” award. It reinforced that I had had a very positive influence on a young athlete’s growth and development and on his teammates over the course of the hockey season.

**It’s a long and often demanding minor hockey season, so when you look back at the season whether as player, coach, parent, or administrator I trust you will have many fond memories of participating in this greatest sport on Earth because the game consists of more than just winning. Winning is not everything. “Relax, it’s just a game”—but it’s the greatest game on Earth so let’s enjoy it!**