

# Hockey Zones

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



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,

—continued on p. 4

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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

# Tucker Hockey

Providing quality year-round professional consultations,  
instruction and services to hockey enthusiasts/stakeholders

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## Adult Hockey Philosophy

*"Would you believe I discovered the fountain of youth? To my surprise it was frozen and had a net on each end."*

## Minor Hockey Philosophy

*"A hundred years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was, or what kind of house I lived in... but the world may be a better place because I was important in the life of a child."*

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\*Includes GST, Practice Jersey and Certificate of Achievement

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Group 1	Wednesdays	January 26th - March 30th	Stu Peppard Arena	noon - 1:00 pm	\$249
Group 2	Sundays	January 9th - March 20th	Father David Bauer	10:00 - 11:15 pm	\$299
Group 3	Saturdays	January 15th - March 26th	Mount Pleasant Sportsplex	12:30 - 1:45 pm	\$299

\*\*Includes GST and Practice Jersey

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# *Welcome to Hockey Zones*

The official newsletter of Tucker Hockey. The Fall 2004 issue consists of fresh hockey education and teaching articles, an expression of hockey philosophies and viewpoints, addresses various hockey issues for public discussion, provides features on hockey people at the "Calgary grass roots rink level", features upcoming Tucker Hockey Adult and Minor hockey programs, and provides hockey quotes, stories, and prize contests. In summary, it will create good hockey...*"Food for Thought!"*

Enjoy your hockey—the World's greatest sport! – and  
I hope you enjoy our quarterly Tucker Hockey Newsletter!



**NO NHL  
this year!**

Millionaires disagreeing with  
billionaires! The  
little guys  
and fans suffer  
the most!  
What are YOUR  
opinions of this  
greedy mess?

*—Let us HEAR  
from YOU!—*



Next Issue: Winter  
Features:

- Letters/Winner Announcements
- Don Gibson Playing Hockey at a Young 63
- Coach Lyle's Article "Safety First"
- People at the Rink – Hockey from a Rink Attendant's Perspective
- Coach Rex's Corner

## **A Coaching Creed**

Be a resource person able to assist the athlete to develop his/her athletic potential and self-dependency.

Recognize individual differences in athletes and always think of the athlete's long term best interests.

Aim for excellence based on realistic goals and the athlete's growth and development.

Lead by example. Teach and practice cooperation, self-discipline, respect for officials and opponents and proper attitudes in language, dress and deportment.

Make sport challenging and fun.

Skills and techniques need not be learned painfully

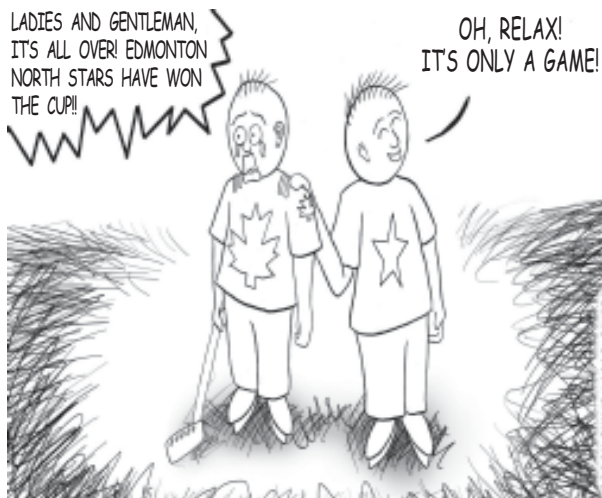
Be honest and consistent with athletes. They appreciate knowing where they stand.

Be prepared to interact with the media, league officials and parents. They too have important roles to play in sport.

Coaching involves training by responsible people who are flexible and willing to continually learn and develop.

Physical fitness should be a lifelong goal for all Canadians. Encourage athletes to be fit all year, every year and not just for the season.

Source: Hockey Canada





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## 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!**



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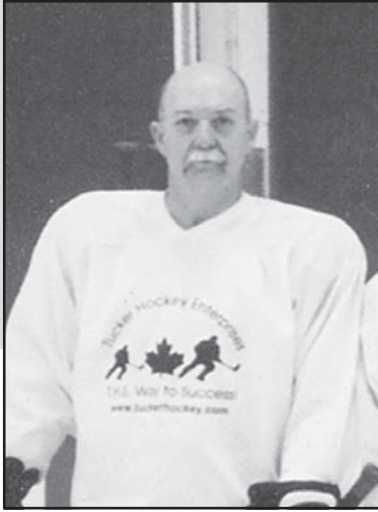
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# Hockey from a Grandfather's Perspective

*John Boborosky is 57 years of age. He's "Grandfather" to 14-year-old Joshua, husband to long-time wife, Dawn, and is currently employed with Acklands Grainger Inc. He spent 21 years in the Canadian Armed Forces, is a hockey player, and is a past Tucker Hockey adult participant.*

Editor's note: During the Spring of 2002, I had the pleasure of instructing John and his grandson, Joshua, during one of my Tucker Hockey adult programs. Prior to their enrollment, I had father-son and mother-daughter and husband-wife combinations but had never had a grandfather-grandson combo before. Earlier this year, I sat down with John to obtain his views on the game of hockey from a grandfather's perspective. Here are some of his thoughts...

**By Rex Tucker**

John Boborosky was born in Edmonton. He learned to skate at the early age of 7, and started playing organized hockey at 9. He has played the game off and on over the past 50 years. In his early years, he said "I played hockey using magazines for shin pads!" Over the years, he played hockey with the Canadian Armed Forces team in Germany and other parts of Europe. Today John continues to play recreational hockey, and hopes his grandson follows his footsteps with a life-long passion for hockey.

**I asked John why he still plays the game of hockey. He told me: "I do it for the exercise. I still enjoy the game. I like the competition" and with a grin added "maybe I surprise a few of the young guys!"**

John remembers the early years with his grandson playing downstairs in the basement with a sponge ball or tennis ball; having a rink in the back yard for his grandson; being out in the cold until 2 a.m. getting the ice in shape for the next day's skate. Over the years, John enjoyed watching his grandson play hockey in the minor hockey system.



You're only as old as you think you are so go at your own pace. We are here to enjoy life, to have fun, and to learn a few things along life's way!

**Why did John sign up for a Tucker Hockey Adult program for himself and his grandson?** He said, "It was really unique to discover a hockey school/instructional program with adults of all ages which also provided an opportunity to skate together with my grandson. It was special! It provided an opportunity to scrimmage, train together, and make plays together. It was a real treat for Joshua's grandmother—who watched all of Joshua's minor hockey games over the year—to see her husband and grandson participating in a hockey program together on the ice."

John added: "I would love to do it more often but my grandson now resides in Surrey, B.C." where he plays with the Surrey Bantam AAA Thunder. John joked "My grandson has good hockey genes—from his father, my son in law, not from me."

Now a grandfather, John admitted to not taking himself as seriously now, enjoying life more, mellowing out a bit, patting his grandson on the back more, giving more compliments and praise than he did to his own kids. "I hate to admit it" he said with a sheepish grin. "I am not a hockey coach or instructor. Many parents watch the game on television and feel they are experts, free to give advice to their kids, often expecting them to do similar plays!"

"It's the coach's job to give the players constructive feedback, not the parents' ...the parents should transport the kids to the game. During the ride home the kids do not want to talk about what went wrong in the game... he or she has already heard feedback from the coach. Let the child listen to his music! If you criticize the child too much he will have low self-esteem and it will carry throughout life. Build the kids up, let them grow to be responsible adults who make good decisions. Don't be afraid to try again, don't be afraid not to succeed, learn from it ...grow... only fail if you don't try."

**John's views on hockey today.** "The instructors are better today; there are better structure and practices, however the sport

## Call for Applications

To be eligible to win the Danny Cammack Memorial Award, you must be an avid hockey player 13 years of age or younger.

To enter, show us your passion! Write a 100-200 word essay on why you love playing the game of hockey. Send your submission along with your name and phone number to [programs@tuckerhockey.com](mailto:programs@tuckerhockey.com). The winning entry will receive a scholarship to The Tucker Hockey Christmas Super Power Skating Program.

Good luck!

## Danny Cammack Memorial Award

### A Grandfather's Perspective (cont'd.)

is too expensive. There are too many games played. Overall, the parents are good but often put too much pressure on their kids. Just let them play, have fun! Let them decide where they want to go in the game."

He added: "Often there's a constant diet of hockey. Drive before the game, shouting instructions at the game, during the drive back home, and at the dinner table. Enjoy life and don't be too serious. Follow your heart. Appreciate the quality time you have with family and friends.

Play lots of hockey—it's the greatest sport in the World! If you don't make it in hockey you acquire other skills from the sport: Hard work, leadership, and team work that enhance your life management and job-related skills."

A grandfather's final comments:

*"You're only as old as you think you are so go at your own pace. We are here to enjoy life, to have fun, and to learn a few things along life's way!"*



## Tucker Hockey Awards

### Minor Hockey Danny Cammack Memorial Award

Danny Cammack had many of the passions of a typical 13 year old but none was greater than the one he had for hockey. What Danny lacked in size, he more than made up for with smooth powerful strides, soft hands and an uncanny puck sense.

As much as he loved the game, he loved the camaraderie that came with being a member of a hockey team. Perhaps this is why he was such a good team player. Dan loved to win but it was not the "be all and end all". He always kept things in perspective. Doing his best and having fun on the ice was what Danny was all about!

### Adult Hockey Bradley Mersereau Memorial Award

This quarterly award is named the "Brad Memorial". It is in memory of Bradley Mersereau, who was an avid participant in Tucker Hockey Adult Programs. Brad never represented himself as a great skater, or, for that matter, a good hockey player. He just loved getting out and being active. He always found a healthy balance between family, work and the enjoyment of hockey. He was a "true friend" and "hockey enthusiast".

#### Award Recipients

Winter 2004 – Jeff Okamura

Spring 2004 – Wilfred Budduke

Summer 2004 – Ronald Wong

Fall 2004 – Homer Two Young Men

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## Today's Topic: *Ready Hockey Stance*

By Lyle Hanna

Balance is a key component of skating. To be poised for action, we need to ensure that our center of gravity is between and over our skates while stationary or maximized while moving. To move from one action to another, we shift our equilibrium to initiate and support the new action. It happens in all sports activities – even walking – consciously or unconsciously.

We were all born with balance but innately different. Coaches teach the mechanics in using it to enhance the hockey players' level of skating skill.

Skating and playing hockey at a higher speed than our opponent give us a definite edge to winning. Therefore, in teaching hockey coaches emphasise, think, and develop ways to increase speed. Speed is generated with powerful strides and how quickly we make those strides, i.e., the time to push-off hard, opposite foot glide, recovery of pushing foot to glide while your weight shifts to that opposite foot, and pushing off. The breakdown of the mechanics of doing this to obtain our goal of "proper technique" will be the subject in a future news letter. For now we will discuss the Number One positioning of your body from which you will launch

those big, powerful, swift strides and be on your way to stardom, called "The Ready Stance".

### The Ready Stance

The ready stance is not only used to go from standing still to moving but you will need to utilize its principles while going through all those gyrations of playing the wonderful game of hockey.

"Balance is a key component of skating... Skating and playing hockey at a higher speed than our opponent give us a definite edge to winning."

angle at this stage; in your stride, your lead knee should be at about a 90-degree angle.

Now, the next action is to get your upper body positioned properly. Think of your body being "hinged" at the hip as you move your upper body into a forward angle that ideally has your shoulder-knee-and-ball-of-your-foot in a straight line. The purpose of

visualising a hinge action at your hips, is to change your body position without compromising your spine.

In your stance, your spine should/must be in its natural configuration: no hump in the back, no crinkle in the neck. Done properly, there will be no unusual or dangerous strain in your back or neck.

Your head rests comfortably between your shoulders, free to swivel, and in a position where your eyes can see the full field of play ahead and peripherally lets you see the puck on your stick and the traffic laterally at the same

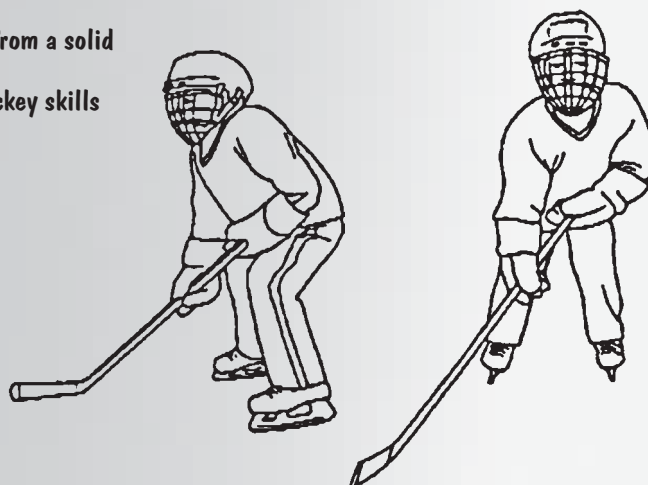
### Basic Hockey Stance

#### Tip Sheet

- Called the "Ready" or "Eagle" position
- Permits a Player to move in any direction from a solid base of support
- Used when executing many of the basic hockey skills such as passing, shooting and checking

#### Key Teaching Points

- Feet are shoulder width apart pointing slightly outward
- Knees and ankles are flexed approximately 45°
- Upper body leans slightly forward approximately 45° with weight on balls of feet
- Shoulders, knees and toes can be joined by a straight line in the basic stance
- Head up, and eyes are forward
- Stick is held with both hands, blade flat on the ice and slightly to the side of the body



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**Generate more scoring opportunities**

**"Finish" plays around the net and score more goals**

**Create a "team goal scoring chemistry" that produces a distinct advantage over the defensive coverage.**

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## **Specific Areas Covered**

### **Individual Scoring Tactics**

- "1 on 1" drive skating attack to the defender's weak side
- "4 Options" attack through the neutral zone into the offensive zone
  - drive skating
  - turn backs
  - delay to the boards, deceptive "tuck and go" move
- "stop up" delay
- Gretzky middle cut
- Breakaway shooting and/or deking strategies
- Demonstrating the Goalie's weakest areas

### **Individual Technical & Skill Development**

- Receiving passes with a "firm" stick, and to avoid "cushion/cradle" of the pass
- Shooting in stride of either leg
- Shooting back against the "flow or the grain"
- One time shooting
- Deflections in front of net
- Deflections as player approaches the net
- Wrap around plays at the net
- Puck protection and longer puck possession

### **Team Scoring Tactics**

- Cycling the puck back into the corner when under defensive pressure
- Various options available from Corner Cycling
- Setting a "pick and roll" play during the Corner Cycling
- Setting a "pick and roll" during the offensive neutral zone attacks
- Shorthanded goal scoring attacks and strategies
- Powerplay goal scoring attack and strategies
- End of the Game "Goaltender Pulled" scoring strategies

### **Transition plays and passing**

- How to take the most advantage of offensive zone turnovers
- How to take the most advantage of neutral zone turnovers
- The optimum strategy for the wingers in transitioning from the defensive zone

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## Ready Hockey Stance (cont'd.)

time—"keep your head on a swivel".

Now you can check your stance by standing your stick against the outside side of one shoulder to see if it makes a straight "line" past your knee, to the ball of your foot. A secondary check can be done by glancing down to see if your knees hide the toes of your skates. It sounds like a lot of checking but it will become second nature to see or feel yourself in the proper stance.

From the proper stance position, we move to the key skills of hockey – such as skating: forwards, backwards, laterally; a variety of stops and starts; tight

turns at high speed, crossover turns to generate acceleration, and pivots; mixing agility with stability as quickly as the changing action demands. Your hips, legs, and feet deliver these essential movements while coordinating support for your upper body to carry out offensive and defensive skills of puck movement and control. This leaves one other body "group" to mention: the head which processes the "read and react" pilot that is boss of these hockey skills—the mechanics of the physiology of hockey.

Tune in next time for some more Hockey tips from Coach Lyle!

"It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the coach in the development of an athlete. From the youngest peewee player to the elite athlete, the coach is a pivotal character in the moral as well as the physical development of his/her charges.

The more intensive the training, the greater the opportunity for moulding the athlete's character and personal philosophy as it pertains to his/her athletic career. Elite athletes appear to cleave to their coaches as mentors, guardians, and, in some cases, almost as surrogate parents. They are fortunate indeed if their coach is concerned with their moral and intellectual development as well as their athletic training."

*(Report of the Dubin Commission of Inquiry into the Use of Drugs and Banned*



**Sometimes the toughest guy you have on your team is the power play!**

—Harry Neale

### Food for Thought :

*"Over the past few years at the NHL level, power play teams have not been as effective at scoring as in previous decades."*

Any thoughts on why not?  
Are players less creative?  
Are coaches less creative?  
Are penalty killing skaters better?  
Is there less room on the ice?  
Other thoughts? Opinions?

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!**  
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## Definition of Success

To laugh often  
and much;

to win the respect of  
intelligent people and  
the affection of children;

to earn the appreciation  
of honest critics and  
endure the betrayal  
of false friends;

to appreciate beauty;  
to find the best in others;

to leave the World  
a bit better, whether by a  
healthy child, a garden  
patch, or a redeemed  
social condition;

to know even one life  
has breathed easier  
because you live.

*This is to have success!*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

FEEDBACK

Tucker Hockey welcomes your comments on any articles published in *Hockey Zones*: send your email to [programs@tuckerhockey.com](mailto:programs@tuckerhockey.com).

The most interesting and noteworthy letters will be considered for "Letter of the Month" and will be published in the next issue of *Hockey Zones* and will receive a Tucker Hockey prize.

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# Learning To Play Hockey—At Age 36!

**Everest, Arabia, the Arctic –  
nothing prepared me for THIS!**

*Editor's Note: Bruce Kirby is an adventurer who has bravely traveled to some of the most remote areas of the world. (See Bio below) The following is Bruce's brave and humorous journey into the hockey world... a very insightful story!*

**By Bruce Kirby**

The e-mail came in just as I stood up to leave the office. *"Hello Wannabe Hockey Players. Tired of being a pylon? Rather be a player? Here is your chance. A group of us have hired a coach (Rex Tucker) and rented ice. It is hockey school for those who have never played hockey before (or are extremely challenged.) Our goal: to put a beer league team together next year.*

*Good News; no experience necessary.*

*Bad News; first practice is tomorrow at 6 a.m."*

The decision was a "no- brainer" for me. The urge to accept this offer was instinctive. Primal. I had to do it!

By the time the sun rose I had begged, borrowed, and bought a dizzying array of hockey equipment. Most was handed down to me from my girlfriend's brother—except the jock, which is something best not to inherit, especially from a girlfriend's brother.

The smell that assaults me as I enter the dressing room door is horrific; I can fairly say it is worse than camel puke or damp neoprene left to rot for months in a dank basement. No one else seemed to notice, though. Obviously, the clean-cut guys in grey suits standing around me have played hockey before.

Emptying my duffel on the bench, I glance around with embarrassment. I have no idea where to start. Hockey is

the first sport where I need instructions just to get dressed. I put on my skates, and then take them off so I can get my pants on. My jersey becomes entangled in my shoulder pads and I have to ask for help. Diligently wrapping tape around my shin pads from top to bottom, I emerge onto the ice looking like a mummy. Taking just a single stride, I fall to the ice, crippled. (In case you have never played hockey before, take my advice: Don't wrap any tape around your shin pads above the knee!) That night, bruises the size of saucers spread across my hamstring where the tape cut in before tearing.

The puck dropped. The pain of the skates, the instability, the inability to stop, the big falls—none of these mattered any more. I was in heaven, or at least Matt Sundin's body. The rest of my worries fade away. Jumping over the boards, sweat dripping from under the helmet—it was how I had always imagined it to be. Headed towards the Promised Land, I was playing hockey!

**Hockey—It's a Canadian game.** Our birthright. The ultimate measure of masculinity—and now a source of pride for our women as well.

But as a Canadian boy who never played hockey (and that is 60% of us), I always felt a little left out. Not quite a man.

Fifteen years of wilderness expeditions to the most remote corners of Earth didn't cure this insecurity. Neither did scorpion stings, crocodile attacks, or hostage-takings. Deep down inside, I knew I was still



## Learning to Play (cont'd.)

a fraud—I couldn't play hockey.

The journey I embarked on that cold Calgary morning has brought me more joy than I could have ever imagined. I now live for Wednesdays. My entire week orbits around that one hour practice with slightly-greying, slightly-thickening, thirty- and forty somethings.

Who cares that the eleven year-olds who practice before us can skate circles around us? We are doing important work! We are investing in our Canadian-ness—in our male-ness!

And how much there is to learn!

A two-minute shift is not short. It is longgg! A pass in the skates will piss your teammates off. A little ball of tape on the butt of your stick will help you pick up the puck from the ice. Skates need to be sharpened more often than once a year. Even though the arena is freezing, you will pour with sweat! You can't leave your gear in the bag for a week after practice—not if you want friends! Best to air it out. Febreze helps. You might need to kick the puck every now and then.

These things are taken for granted by those who have played a life-time of hockey and who find skating as simple as walking. But I appreciate each new gem as if I am speaking a secret language, joining an exclusive club.

As a late learner you'll never be as good as those kids who wore skates from birth. But perhaps that is the best part about learning to play hockey in middle age.

There is no doubt about what you are doing. You'll never play in the NHL. You'll never try out for a rep team. There is no pressure. It's just about fun!

And you never take the game for granted either. It feels like a gift. Every practice brings the joy of discovery. Every time I hoist my bag and creep out of the house in the frigid hours of pre-dawn, I feel like the kid in the Quik commercial. (And talking about the Quik ad... I always through the Mom was full of it back then. "Its not winning that matters, it is whether you had fun or not." "Gimme a break," I thought at the age of 12. Now it makes perfectly good sense!)

Twenty-five weeks after that first, uncertain practice I arrived at a suburban arena to join a late night beer-league pick up game. Thirty fast, mean, intimidating men were flying around the ice. Pucks whizzed past my head, smacking against the glass, making me jump.

"Do you play D or O," someone asked when we gathered on the bench. How could I tell him I'd never played either? "D," I picked, figuring I could hide on the blueline.

"Left or right?"

Too many decisions.

Too late! The game was underway. Minutes later a sweating, grunting, heaving body slammed into the boards in front of me, and gasped "Left D". The gate swung open. I stepped out. I WAS PLAYING HOCKEY!



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### Bruce's Bio

After graduating from University with a degree in Engineering Physics, Bruce spent six months in an office before his love for wilderness and adventure tore him away. In the ensuing years Bruce has lead expeditions around the globe, carving a niche as one of Canada's premier adventure photographers and writers. His journeys – to over sixty countries – include a first descent of Ethiopia's Blue Nile Gorge, a traverse of Iceland by foot, crossing Arabia's great southern desert by camel, and explorations in Greenland, Myanmar and Borneo.

Bruce is currently the Editor-at-Large at Outpost Magazine. His writing has appeared in TIME, the Globe and Mail, and the National Post. His first book, *Sand Dance, By Camel Across Arabia's Empty Quarter*, spent 14 weeks on the National Bestseller List, was short listed for Best Adventure Travel at the Banff Mountain Book Festival.

Bruce's photographs have appeared in National Geographic Adventure, Outside, American Photo, Maclean's, Explore, and Men's Fitness. Three of his adventures have been featured in National Geographic video documentaries. The Globe and Mail recently picked Bruce as one of the young leaders to watch in the new millennium.

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