

Tryouts: How Will YOU Respond?

We talk lots about tryouts in this newsletter. We hope some of it resonates with both parents and kids. It is a stressful time: for kids, for parents, for coaches, for DJ who takes the brunt of the criticism, and the Board Members who are guilty by association.

In my next life I would like to coach golf, track, or swimming. Pretty simple; the better score or the better time makes the team. I lived that life as the Father of a High School golfer for four years at New Trier. I can honestly say, the coaching staff could not have been any fairer than they were. As a freshman she made the Varsity team for the first tournament of the year. I knew that this tournament would sort of determine her positioning for the year; play well and a varsity spot was there...play poorly and it might mean a year on the JV team. Suffice to say it was not her best day on the course. Mind you, I think she shot about a 90 which isn't horrible at most schools or for most of us but at New Trier, it doesn't cut the mustard.

So it was a year on the JV and that was just fine; she played and contributed in every event, won the Team conference championship and finished in the top 3, and improved and got to play a couple of Varsity events. It all worked out just fine.

And so 20 of us coaches are charged with picking the **RIGHT** team; that doesn't always mean the most talented team because talent means nothing without work ethic, attitude, and coach-ability. We want kids that are good locker room kids. We want kids that block shots, back-check like crazy, win battles, and play hard.

So we encourage you to drop off your child, tell them to have fun and you love them, and then go out to dinner, or a movie, or for a walk in the Botanic Gardens. In other words, if you are relaxed, so is your child. Let the process take place.

Our job as coaches is to observe. In most all cases we have already spoken to their coach from the previous season. I have met with the coach taking over my team probably 10 times. That is the due diligence part of coaching. After the session we talk as a group; coaches amongst each other, coaches with the Hockey staff to get more feedback. The club also has a board member proctor system; a board member without a child at that level sits in and observes. Most are amazed at the amount of thought that goes into this. As you can imagine, the last few picks are the most challenging. It might come down to a single play that they made, or a position they play. From this, we pick a team.

We are not always right; we pick "sure things" that do not perform as expected. Conversely, we pick "diamonds in the rough" that exceed all expectations.

And so your child doesn't make the team of choice; does that mean we didn't like your child? Does it mean that "politics" determined the choices? Does it mean your child will never make a top team or play for New Trier Green? Does it mean it is time for you to leave the club and play elsewhere?

The answer to all these questions is NO.

YES we like your child: we just think he/she will develop better on a lower team.

YES we cut people; for three straight years I did not select the president's son, and then the travel director's son. We still speak, and we are still friends, and they still might disagree with my decision...but as coaches we must focus solely on doing what we believe is right. When the tryout starts picking the RIGHT team is all that matters.

YES you can still play for New Trier Green; case in point three years ago New Trier won state with 10 players from Winnetka that never once played on the top team. You see, it is very much possible that your child will develop more playing on a lower team; more puck touches, more goal scoring, more special team play, more leadership.

It is OK for you and your child to be disappointed. We hear "My child was devastated" pretty frequently. I tend to think devastation doesn't ever occur playing a sport you love. Devastation occurs when bad things happen to good people, not when you don't make the team you want. Disappointment is OK/devastation is not. It is also OK for you to discuss with the coach why your child didn't make the team. Last Labor Day I had a meeting with a player and his Dad that lasted for 45 minutes. I gave him reasons why he didn't make it and the areas of his game he needs to improve upon. We won't ever compare your child to another; that's not fair to either child.

Best of luck to all the players: play hard and have fun!

To all the Moms and Dads: keep calm and carry on!