

Elliotte Friedman of 31 Thoughts: Minor Hockey Coach's Text to His Team's Parents

30. This is a little long, but I wanted to share it. It's a text a minor hockey coach sent out a couple of weeks ago. Here goes:

Hello Team, now that the regular season is over and we head into the final weeks, I wanted to take a few minutes to share some thoughts with you. First of all I want to say how honoured I am to be one of your kids' coaches. We have a great group of kids who love to play and we have a lot of fun together. We are also very fortunate to have a team that wins more often than not. One of the challenges this presents as a coach is that it can limit some good coaching opportunities because I believe that some of the best coaching moments come through facing adversity and yes, losing. I hate to lose and I hope that nobody ever gets used to it, but adversity and losing provide great teaching moments, and reveals character not only in the players, but also in us as coaches & parents. For me the character development of your child is far more important than any pass made, goal scored or championship won.



Hockey and all sports can be a great teacher, if you let it. As a coach, I want to challenge all of us as parents to look for the teaching moments in the game. If you're spending more time worrying and complaining about missed passes, how much ice time your kid gets, who the first one on the ice should be, how fast or slow kids are, or complaining that someone isn't good enough to play with your kid, you're missing the whole point. Think about the opportunity to develop your child's natural persistence, determination, discipline, dedication, resiliency, work ethic, heart, leadership skills, connection with and respect for others, not only in competition but in life! I had a coach once ask me what the difference between a good player and a great player was. He said good players are just good players, but a great player has the ability to make everyone around him better. I'd ask each of us, are we encouraging our kids to be just good, or great? How can your kid come to the rink and build up those around him and make everyone else better? Just as important, are you as a parent modelling positive behaviour and showing respect towards other kids on the team? I've played on great teams with average players, and average teams with great players. The point is that it takes a "team" to win, and the stronger that bond is, the better chance you have.

Hockey will end for our kids whether it be a year from now, after high school, college, or even if they win the lottery and play in the NHL, it will end. When it does, I hope that all of our kids will have learned and developed the character traits that will help them be successful when that time comes. I was blessed to play a lot of hockey in my life beyond minor hockey. I played Division I on a full scholarship, I signed with the Detroit Red Wings out of college at a time they had 15 Hall of Fame players on the team. I signed six NHL contracts over 10 years, and ended up playing more than 600 professional games in the AHL, NHL and Europe.

Many of you probably don't know that they have a veteran rule in the AHL. Once you play 360 pro games you are considered a veteran and each team is only allowed to carry five of these guys. For a player to keep playing after 360 games is very difficult. The biggest reason I was able to do it was because of character. I was named a team captain eight out of the 10 years I played. I don't say any of this boastfully, but in hopes that you will understand that there is so much more going on in the game.

It is a very difficult process transitioning out of hockey after 10 years and back into the real world, but it was all the things I mentioned above that enabled me to do it — and end up working for a Fortune 500 company leading the coaching and development for their sales force. Another benefit of playing hockey so long was that I got to see and experience a lot of different coaches and coaching styles. From the most demanding in Mike Babcock, to the ultimate players' coach in Guy Gadowsky, from some of the best communicators and teachers (Bruce Boudreau), to coaches who had no business being in a position to develop a child or an athlete (these guys are the reason I coach because I see them every time I go to an arena, or I hear them on the benches next to ours, and I would never want them near my kid, or yours).

I don't include myself when I say this, but I hope you all realize how fortunate your kids are to have the character and experience that your kids are getting at this level. Coaching is not an exact science, especially when you have 20 different personalities that need to be coached and motivated all a little differently. I believe there is a fine line at "10-under travel" because we have to remember that these kids are only 10. They're not superstars who make every play, every time! They are also playing travel and that means they do need to have demands placed on them, to learn accountability, to be challenged, and to be coachable. As a coach and a parent, I would hope that these are the things being reinforced at home no matter what team you're on. I'd love for these boys to have the experience of winning another league title, and everything I've talked about contributes in its own small or big way.

I hope I've provided a little different perspective on the game, and from behind the bench. I want to say again how honoured I am to have the opportunity to coach your kids. It's not something I take lightly because I do realize how much more is at stake than ice time, how many goals you score, or winning a hockey game. Billy Graham said, "A coach will impact more people in one year than the average person will in an entire lifetime", and I agree!