

Defining a Successful Season

By Tom Gullen

My Pee Wee Team just was knocked out of the state tournament. I have coached for 38 years but I will tell you, it still stings when you lose a big game. I told my team the same thing on Saturday; you played a good game. No regrets; we just couldn't get a puck past their goalie despite outplaying them badly. It's OK that this hurts a little right now because that means it matters to you.

I am sad because it was a very good team that was easy to coach and came a long way this year. I really wanted to see how far we could go...

Early in my career a former WHC President by the name of Terry Beacom taught me a few things. He was a big house league guy...loved the house league. "I want every game to end in a tie." Of course I was 24 and I looked at him like he was from another planet but I soon understood the lesson; create equal teams, make every game close.

His other great line was "the sign of a successful season was a kid that wanted to play hockey next year." Back in those days, before Survey Monkey and everything we do now to get people's input, it was a far simpler barometer; did they sign up to play the next season?

So as we close the book on this season, what should define a successful season? Yes we hope every kid signs up for hockey in the fall of 2019...but I would say there are five key things that will define a successful season for any player in our program:

1. **Did my child get better?** Are they better at the core skills of hockey? Can they skate at the level needed for his/her team because without skating skills, nothing else will matter? For older players, do they understand team concepts like a breakout, fore-checking system, power play and penalty kill? Do they utilize the other four players on the ice with them?
2. **Did the program deliver what you expected on the ice?** Hockey is not cheap at both the House and especially the travel levels. Did you have enough practice time? Was the practice time convenient (or in the case of those teams that practice before school, tolerable?) Did you benefit from skill sessions? Did you play the right number of games?
3. **Did the program deliver what you expected off the ice?** Was the program organized? Were you communicated with promptly? Were you aware of your schedule far enough in advance? Was the program run in a professional way relative to other sports programs in the community?
4. **Did my coach care about my kid?** Let's face it...if you look real hard you can find a deficiency in every coach. That includes Joel Quenneville. Some coaches are great at practices, others great in games. Some coaches love to talk after every game, and some communicate via e-mail. These are youth hockey coaches, very few of whom do this for a livelihood. They make a few bucks but spend five hours out of their Saturday driving to Orland Park and back for a one hour game. They give up six months of their life to give back to a sport that gave them something as a kid.

So, ask yourself one simple question: did the coach care? Did he want to see my child improve? Did he want to see the team succeed? Did he teach values such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play? Did he do his best to motivate your child and the team? Did he understand the mission of our club and what we try to accomplish?

5. **Did my kid have fun?** Hockey is a game and games are supposed to be fun. Does your child love going to games and practices? Does he love being part of a team?

And, as Mr. Beacom taught me almost 40 years ago...**does he or she want to sign up to play hockey next year?**