

SPORTS

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2018 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award winner: Dennis Norton

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Looking over the list of the 40 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award recipients before him, Dennis Norton says he's either been mentored by or worked with "a grand majority" of those honourees.

Norton, 63, was born and raised in Glen Williams, learning to skate on the Credit River alongside brother Don before playing tyke under 1998 Hockey Heritage winner Walter 'Red' Asseltine.

His father, Roy Norton Sr., the second Hockey Heritage recipient, in 1979, ran the Saturday morning Legion Minor Hockey leagues and Dennis served as a timekeeper.

"My family was always involved with hockey and it wasn't out of the norm for a lot of people we knew in town," said Norton, naming 1999 award recipient Bob Webster as his favourite coach.

"There was a lot of great mentorship for me growing up from past recipients and it wasn't just about hockey, but in real-life skills as well. Of course, when my own kids got involved, you register and they remind you that coaches are needed and you step up to the plate. These programs wouldn't exist without the volunteers, but it wasn't like work. It was enjoyable to see the smile on a kid's face. That was the payoff."

Norton played for the Legion minor Jr. A team and at the all-

star level before catching the coaching bug as a teen, helping out with the Saturday morning American Hockey League for three years.

When sons Brad and Ryan began playing, Norton followed their careers by coaching or assisting, winning house league and Tri-County titles while earning the Georgetown Minor Hockey Association's (GMHA) Coach of the Year award in 1996-97 and the Joe Pentesco Executive of the Year honour in 1998 and 2000.

But wins and losses were not the top priority for Norton's teams. During those years, he was the lead instructor for the GMHA's IP, introducing skills development and fundamentals to kids under seven years old.

"You can never lose a hockey game if you know what you need to work on to improve your team for the next outing," Norton added.

"That's where I come from. A loss is actually a learning experience and it should be for everyone. You try to develop that kind of thought process where you say, 'Yes, we didn't get the two points, but we know now what we have to do next time to get those two points.'"

Norton took on a number of executive roles with the GMHA and helped develop a manual to assist both rep and junior house league coaches with practice-planning workshops and resource materials, along with a yearly plan for tyke coaches to reinforce and support skills be-



Eamonn Maher/Metroland

Glen Williams native Dennis Norton has been chosen as the 2018 recipient of the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Council Award. The longtime coach and Georgetown/Halton Hills Minor Hockey Association executive will be honoured at the 41st-annual GHHC Awards Dinner on Monday, March 5 at the Acton Legion.

ing developed in the initiation program.

In 1996, he received a call from Tom Bly at the Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OM-

HA) asking him to join the organization's IP Working Committee and he became the point man for programs across the province for several years. He

was also a certified course conductor, facilitating CHIP and coach level certification workshops for the OMHA.

Norton said he's excited about the recent Hockey Canada directive to make it mandatory for players at the CHIP level to play cross-ice/half-ice hockey, allowing them to better develop their skills.

"Let's make the game age appropriate and size appropriate for the age," said Norton, who acknowledged there's been a lot of parent resistance to the move, despite analytic proof to show otherwise.

"The science and the data is there that proves it is best for the participant. We all want the best for our kids and it's hard for some people to accept that it doesn't have to be played on a full ice surface, but I think we're going in the right direction."

In February 2000, Norton and John Murphy ran the very first Canadian Hockey Initiation Program Festival for the OMHA in Georgetown, resulting in the development of an initiation program (IP) Festival guide and manual on how to operate a successful IP festival, which is still utilized today.

He worked on a number of OMHA Coach Tech Committees (CTC) over the years to improve coaching certification programs and helped develop the "Our Game" presentation for parents that was used at a number of parent nights for local

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