



Sidelines

by Garry Forbes

The toughest time of the season

Hockey is a tough game. Some say brutal. But, for whatever reasons, hockey is important to us. It has touched directly most every Canadian living today. And because it's so inherently important to us, because it's so much a part of our national identity, it has become virtually interchangeable with terms such as pride, respect, and success.

And, also because of its inherent importance, it is the cause, this time of year, of tens of thousands of shattered dreams, crushed egos, and broken hearts.

This is the beginning of the hockey season. It is the time when kids from every city and town in Canada try out for the team.

And it is a time when kids get cut.

There will be those of you who may find it hard to believe that a kid can take so much to heart a silly thing like getting cut from a hockey team. But consider again this game and its significance on our society. Think about the effect on a kid when almost all the symbols of athletic achievement point - rightly so or not - to one higher plateau...to be a hockey star.

In the U.S., as in most other countries, kids can shift their targets according to physical capability, circumstance, or even a simple change of mind. There, a football star is as acceptable an idol as a baseball star or basketball star, or, even, a boxer. Here, it's Gretzky.

That's the clincher: It's important in Canada to be a good hockey player. Add to that some schoolyard peer influence and the catalyst of sheer envy and you've got a lot of kids who step gingerly onto the ice every September with heads like pressure cookers that have been left on high simmer since last year.

Then the cuts come.

You see, it's something more than rejection from a sport; it's rejection from the mainstream.

And kids handle it in many different ways. Some try again next year. Some promise to give up the game for life, and

some do just that. Some go on to excel in other sports. But, as we've pointed can run from hockey but you can't hide. It's everywhere and it'll be everywhere as long as there are Canadians. It's almost impossible to ignore, even if you were rejected by it sometime in the past.

Some of the older ones call the coach, often several times, disbelieving; especially those who made the team the year before. Some blame the coach outright, others join parents in blaming the coach outright.

Ah, yes. The coach. The other side of this grisly subject.

Apparently, and understandably enough, it's hard for a kid and his parents to do too much thinking about what a coach goes through when faced with the task of telling a boy his sails are made of paper.

I know a couple of coaches to whom it's hell. If they could, if only to spare themselves the season's toughest job, they would keep every kid who showed up. But of course they can't. So they go about it, playing the reluctant executioner, worrying about whether they've made a mistake and ruined a promising career, doubting their capabilities, their judgement, losing sleep, letting it prey on their minds.

They swap stories as if to re-affirm their actions; relating to each other why they had to do it.

After one coach announced who would be showing up for practice next time, he invited those cut to the arena office for an explanation. One boy showed.

"I told him he just wasn't sharp enough," says the coach. "His passes were off and he wasn't keeping up to the play. I suggested he get himself signed up for house league and there was a chance we'd pick him up later. I told him not to give up, to stick with it."

It turned out the boy had already paid his house league fee. He then explained to the coach that maybe he shouldn't have tried out for centre, that he had an eye problem since birth and has trouble seeing to the left side.

"Then he slumped up and said it was his attitude I already knew that, but I didn't know why. I told him that was his whole problem. He didn't think he could make it. He was convinced he couldn't."

"But, you know, someday I think he might...he was the only boy man enough to come into that office."

The only boy man enough.

It's a tough game; sometimes more, sometimes less.



Consolation winners

Mr. Submarine captured the Olympia Fastball League Consolation title last Tuesday by defeating the Midland Merchants in two straight games. Back row,

from left: Wayne Latour, Mark Ladouceur, Mike Gallagher, Andy Trayner, (coach), Coke Crawley, Randy Duguey; front row: Doug McGibbon,

Dennis Gignac, Sam Antoni, (sponsor), Bob Levick, Bernie Marchildon. Bat boy - Andreas Antoni. Absent - Tom Fisher, Lawrence Gagnon.

Athletics' spirits high

Midland Athletics' high pre-season spirits were fueled further Sunday as the club came up with a 5-5 tie against the Georgetown Raiders at Midland Arena.

Under normal circumstances, a tie in exhibition play wouldn't mean much to anybody. But in this case, it was the top club from last season's OHA Intermediate A loop - easily the top club - and last year's basement dwellers - deep in the basement.

The tie gave the former basement-dwellers a win and a tie in exhibition play. And no losses.

Sunday's game was a back-and-forth affair, with Georgetown jumping into their familiar position, the lead, at 2:37 of the first period on a goal by Gary McFayden. The Athletics bounced back with a goal from Ross Cousineau a little more than

three minutes later, with assists from Terry Spiker and Gary Hansforth.

The Raiders' Steve Glewes put his club ahead again at 7:38, but Midland stormed back with an unassisted power play marker by Larry Cowan at the midway mark point of the opening frame.

McFayden added his second goal of the contest early in the second period, but the Athletics still wouldn't stay down, responding with a pair of goals, first by Andy Zurawski, then by Ken Knapton. Mark Duquette and Doug Gillespie assisted Don Zurawski's effort. Knapton's was unassisted.

Georgetown scored two more times in the last two minutes of the period - the first by Glewes, the second by Peter Sturgeon - to take back a 5-4 lead.

Midland powered into the third period

looking confident they might have their second pre-season victory at the expense of last season's champs. They fired 18 shots at the Georgetown net, to the Raiders' eight, but nothing got by the visiting goaltender until Bill Arbour found the handle with 1:53 to play. Doug McMann and Duequette picked up assists on the game-tying play.

Midland fired a total of 37 shots on the Raiders' goaltender. Athletics rookie netminder Craig Watson faced 38.

Raiders picked up five minor penalties in the contest to the Athletics' three.

Next pre-season test for Midland is slated for Wednesday in Orillia against the Terriers. Season opener is Friday in Georgetown, and home opener is set for Sunday, 8 p.m., against Orillia.

Hunt down slightly as birds elusive

Many waterfowl at Wye and Tiny marshes seemed a little more perceptive this year and managed to elude the shots of local hunters during Saturday's season-opening.

The take among the limited 50 Wye Marsh hunters and 300 marksmen at Tiny was down slightly, according to Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources officials.

Some expected an above-average day due to an increase in the numbers of birds in the area, but, to the chagrin of the hunters - who began their annual undertaking before dawn - the birds seemed able to find their way to sanctuary areas more quickly this year.

"It wasn't exceptional this year, because the birds seemed to be wiser to where the sanctuaries were, and kept out of the way," said Andy Fletcher, Tiny and Wye Superintendent.

Geese at the Wye Marsh seemed wisest of all. Despite the fact that goose hunting was allowed at Wye this season for the first time in 11 years, none were taken.

"Some of the hunters entering the marsh early may have scared them away," Fletcher said. "They just headed back to safety at Little Lake."

One report noted the birds seemed to be following a more roundabout flight path in their circuit from Little Lake to Wye Marsh, making their way into the sanctuary area (about a quarter of the area at each marsh) by following a more southerly route over more populated areas of town.

Fletcher noted that hunters were "very co-operative" in the ministry's continuing study of the problem of lead ingestion by ducks. Some ducks, which feed from the muddy bottoms of the marshes, have been shown to ingest lead shot and develop lead poisoning. The MNR has been studying the problem by removing gizzards from downed birds and shipping them to ministry labs for analysis.

Some hunters weren't quite so co-operative, however, in the observance of provincial regulations. Three charges were laid at Tiny by conservation officers at Tiny - one for the killing of a pied-billed grebe, a protected species, and two for exceeding the daily limit for ducks. The usual incident at Wye was a tipped canoe, but no one was hurt.

Fletcher expects the remainder of the season - which ends Dec. 20 - to go pretty much as normal, but warns that hunters could be in for an early winter. Many birds are migrating earlier than normal this year, he said, pointing out in particular the early appearance of snow geese in the area Monday morning.