

McLeod answered call to coach

Through a joint federal-provincial initiative, 1989 has been declared 'The Year of the Coach'. There are an estimated 400,000 coaches at the various levels of different sports nation-wide.

Whitchurch-Stouffville has always boasted well-developed sports programs for its young people, partly because of the men and women who have come forward to coach our teams, whether bottom end house league outfits, or provincial tittlist all star clubs.

The Tribune wants to participate in this act of recognizing and promoting the idea of coaching, so it is our intention to spotlight several coaches as the year wears on. Please feel free to drop off written submissions to our office with suggestions of who should be so featured.

By BRUCE STAPLEY

Seven years ago, after signing up his daughter Jennifer to play T-Ball in the Town's minor ball program, Ballantrae's Jim McLeod suddenly realized he hadn't been phoned and told when the team was to begin practicing for the upcoming season.

A call to the area convener asking when his daughter should report was met with the reply, "When do you want to start? It's up to you. You're the coach."

When he had recovered from the shock, after uttering something about a misunderstanding, McLeod gathered up his wits, his daughter, and his ball glove and headed out to the park to teach 15 five-year-olds how to play ball.

"I had never even heard of T-Ball," he recalls with a grin. "I think I spent the first year in a fog. None of the kids could hold onto a bat. But it was a learning experience, and by the end of the season, things started to shape up."

Seven years later, McLeod boasts the satisfaction of having watched his original assortment of sand castle builders and wild-armed wonders mature into capable ball players. Some have even gone on to play for the Town's rep teams.

"I just kept moving up with my daughter. For the most part, the same kids have stayed with me, and I've had the confidence of both the kids and their parents."

Such has been his enjoyment of coaching the same group each year that he finds himself disappointed when one of them decides to drop out.

"I hate to see them leave. I remember one girl who wasn't very good at first, but she was trying hard, and was progressing. Then she decided to leave. I ran into her and tried to talk her into coming back. I felt bad."

While McLeod can claim only one first place finish in his seven years coaching, he feels he's won in other ways each season.

"I've had a good time. If you're not having a good time, you shouldn't be out there, because it rubs off on the kids, and they don't enjoy it."

For McLeod, victories have taken on other forms that go far beyond scoring the most runs.

"I remember one boy crying when the ball went past him. Now, he's a good ball player. I look at him now and I just think back to that day."

"Another girl couldn't throw right at first. Now, she throws and plays very well."



Coach Jim McLeod enjoys his role as a ball coach, and encourages others to take up the sideline. The coach of the Ballantrae Lions is shown here giving some tips to (from left) Sarah Cliff, Jennifer McLeod and Stephanie McLeod.

And the opportunity has given him a chance to watch his own girls learn the game. "They've both developed a lot. They can throw and catch and hit pretty well now."

McLeod admits it took some time for him to develop the proper temperament for coaching children, and that it wasn't until he was asked to umpire a game that he finally mastered the art of self control.

"I've mellowed. I used to get a little irritated with umpires. But

after I umpired a Pee Wee game, it gave me more insight. I almost had to toss a guy. I'd much rather coach than umpire."

McLeod says he has always had the support of the parents of the kids he has coached, and that he has made a point of briefing them at the start of each season on what he expects of them.

"I've always told them: I wouldn't be a babysitter. They are there at the games and practices to pick up their kids, or to watch them. Parents will always

lay ball with you as long as you tell them."

McLeod takes time before each game to make up a chart telling where each of his players will play from inning to inning, a plan he says works well for the most part. "But if a player doesn't make it to the game, or is late, it throws the whole thing off."

He says he tries to be fair, giving each child the chance to play all positions, and that he encourages parents to get the right equipment for their child.

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



MELANIE MACKWOOD
Of the Markham Aquatic Club recently won the 50 metre freestyle event and set a club record in the 100 metre backstroke in the Quebec Cup meet in Montreal recently.

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