

Coach didn't let disability hold him back

Clipper bench boss won golds at amputee worlds

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

When Shawn Leonard gives a pep talk to his Stouffville minor peewee Clippers hockey team, he often reminds them winning isn't everything.

But giving up isn't an option, the 41-year-old Stouffville resident is always quick to add.

Folding the tent is something Leonard could easily have done during his youth hockey career.

That's because he was born without a left hand.

Possessing an infectious appetite for playing the game, Leonard persevered and never allowed that disability to interfere since he made his playing debut at the age of five while growing up in Newmarket.

GRATEFUL FOR MINOR HOCKEY

Moving to Stouffville when he was 12, Leonard played in the Clippers organization where he was moved to the wing after launching his career as a centre.

In an effort to place himself on an equal footing with his teammates, Leonard felt he had to be better in other facets of the game.

That meant being more cerebral and, at the same time, logging extra time whenever he could to work on specific skill development.

"I loved the game of hockey at an early age and always wanted to be better than the players around me," he said. "However, for me to be better I had to be smarter positionally and work harder than others

because it took longer for me to make hard passes and take hard shots on net.

"Even in rep hockey, I was probably one of the last kids to raise the puck off the ice and I couldn't take a slap shot until my teenage years. To make the rep teams, I had to work as hard on my strengths as I did on my weaknesses and eventually it paid off."

To this day, Leonard tries to relate that back to his troops.

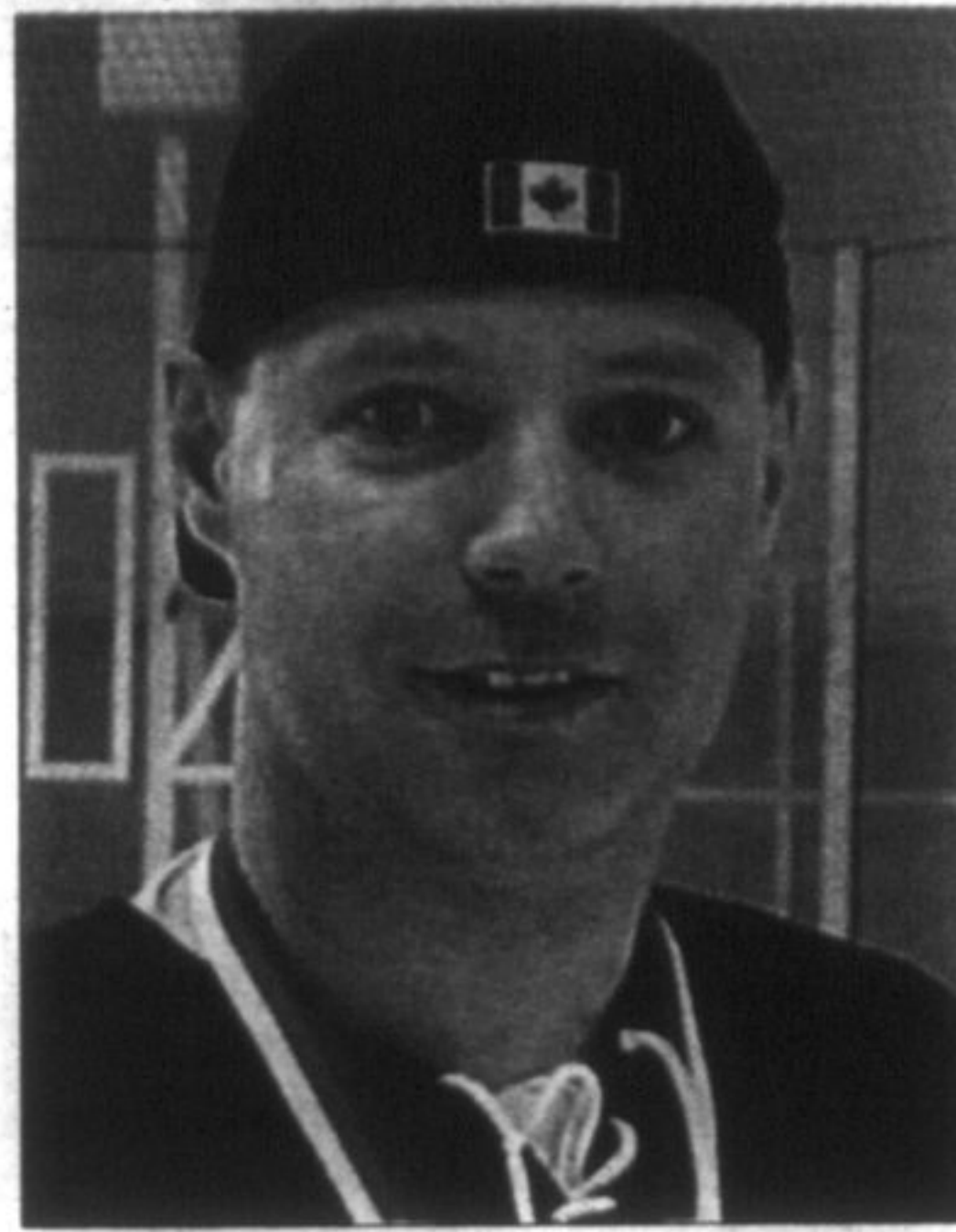
"When I give free time to kids in a practice and all they do is slap the puck, I make a point of telling them that when you work on your weaknesses, your strengths naturally develop further and then you can see the positive results of their overall skill development," he said.

While Leonard had the good fortune of playing for the Clippers bantam team that skated off with an Ontario Minor Hockey Association title in 1982, the pinnacle of his playing career came in 2003 and 2004 when he was a member of Team Canada that competed in the International Standing (Amputee) Ice Hockey Federation world championships.

Playing forward and defence for Team Canada, Leonard was part of gold-medal teams in Helsinki, Finland, in 2003 and Prague, Czech Republic, in 2004.

His current-day Clippers have their own shot at an OMHA title. They're three rounds into the playdowns, facing Orillia in a minor peewee A quarter-final series. The best-of-five opens tonight in Orillia. Game 2 goes Sunday at 5:40 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena.

Employed as a project manager for a home builder in the GTA, Leonard is in his second season as a rep coach with the Clippers. He and his wife, Tara, have three children, Brittany, Cody and Brooke.



SHAWN LEONARD: Coach with team in OMHA quarter-finals won a provincial title on a Stouffville squad in 1982.

"I got involved in coaching because of my passion for the game, my many years of experience and overall knowledge of the game. Minor hockey was such a positive influence in my life that I feel a responsibility to give back to the game all the positive influences that I've received from those who coached me and the volunteers over so many years," he said.

HOST OMHA PLAYOFF GAME SUNDAY

Most important, though, Leonard hopes the experiences he's endured through his years as a player will inspire those learning the nuances of the game.

"I share stories with the kids of my playing days and how much effort it takes to be the best you can be in sport and in life.

"I always let the kids know that in sport and in life, the only limits you have are the ones you set upon yourself," he said.

Lai just Ducky at swim meet

Members of the Stouffville Ducks Swim Club ventured to Richmond Hill recently to take part in the Richmond Hill Aquatic Club's Winter Invitational and recorded some encouraging results.

Gloria Lai highlighted the Stouffville contingent after placing third in the girls' 15 and over 50-metre freestyle.

Lai also finished fifth in the 100m freestyle, eighth 200m freestyle, ninth 200m butterfly, 11th 100m butterfly and 15th 200m individual medley.

The Ducks offer swim programs in Stouffville and Aurora.

For more results, go to our website, yorkregion.com For more on the Ducks, go to ducksswimming.ca

Free Family Fun Day

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10am - 3pm

A range of fun winter activities for the whole family... Crazy carpeting, snowshoeing, X-country skiing,

wagon rides,

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animals,

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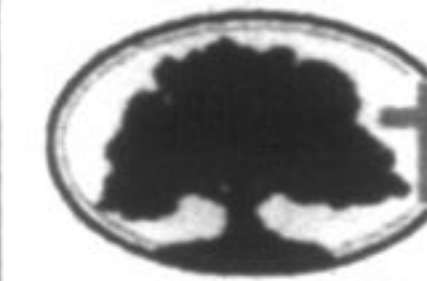
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City TV's Frank Ferragine

Saturday March 7th
11:00 am to 12:30 pm

Markham Theatre, 171 Town Centre
Boulevard, Markham

Composting, rain barrels, English perennials and kitchen gardens: these new trends are all revisited from the days gone by. The desire to create sustainable and natural gardens has led us back to our past. Frank will discuss the revival of old school garden techniques and how they are being used in today's modern world.

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Garden Design Workshop Series

All Garden Design Workshops run 7:30pm to 9:00pm

MARCH 31 Weed free, water free, no mow gardening success
Tuesday March 31st
Aurora Senior's Hall

APRIL 14 Fabulous plant choices to get colour in shade
Tuesday April 14th
Newmarket Community Centre

APRIL 02 No fail plants for a first garden
Thursday April 2nd
Richmond Hill Public Library

APRIL 16 Tough love for drought tolerant gardens
Thursday April 16th
Sharon Temple

APRIL 07 Uncommon plants for star groundcover solutions
Tuesday April 7th
Woodbridge Pool and Memorial Hall

APRIL 21 Heroes for hot dry boulevards
Tuesday April 21st
Nobleton Community Recreation Centre

APRIL 09 Right plant, right place
Thursday April 9th
Stephen Leacock Theatre

APRIL 23 Rethinking the front lawn
Thursday April 23rd
Ballantrae Community Centre

Garden Centre Workshops

Various times

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JUNE 14 Kitchen gardens/butterfly gardening
Sunday June 14th
1pm to 3pm
Blue Willow Garden Centre

MAY 14 Designing with trees and shrubs
Thursday May 14th
7pm to 9pm
Reeves Nurseries

JUNE 20 Container gardening
Saturday June 20th
10am to 12pm
Black Forest Garden Centre

MAY 28 Creative containers
Thursday May 28th
7pm to 9pm
Sheridan Nurseries

MAY 30 Creating a water efficient outdoor oasis
Saturday May 30th
10am to 12pm
Pathways to Perennials



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