



EXPERIENCING THE WORLD POND HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS

by
Jim Menno

My heart is still pumping after a good skate on my backyard rink. It's a good time to write this reflection. A great life experience involves special moments and special people. Here's why the World Pond Hockey Championship in Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, Canada has been a great life experience for me and my teammates.

I learned to skate and play hockey on a pond in Norwood, Massachusetts at 11 years of age. Now, forty years later, I get to travel to the Pond Hockey Hall of Fame and be a kid again playing this great game at its purest level. Only now, my brother doesn't appear at the end of the day and call me home for dinner. Now, I get to join my teammates and fellow competitors in the beer tent for a hard earned beverage and the unique camaraderie shared by all who play.

In February 2007, when our team first emerged from the woods and saw Roulston Lake and the twenty outdoor "rinks of dreams", it was reminiscent of seeing the brilliant green grass of Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, for the first time as a kid. But this was better; we were going to be able to play on them!

We were welcomed to the tournament at that same moment by Rick Haddad, a hockey purist and a true gentleman. Rick made us all feel like we were special; like we were part of this tournament; like we belonged here in Plaster Rock. Thank you again Rick.

The championship has taught me and my fellow Puckweisers to be grateful for our good health at 50 years of age. It has provided us with a truly motivating reason to keep in shape and stay fit in order to try to get back here each year, for as long as life allows. It truly helped me recover from a new metal resurfaced hip last year to attain my goal of playing in the 2008 games. Yes, we have found the "Fountain of Youth", only it is 26 inches thick and frozen at Roulston Lake!

The World Pond Hockey Championship allows me to still be a teammate to three of my most trusted and special friends in the world: John Spatola, Kevin Hawley and Jack McDonough, two of whom I have played hockey with since I was a kid. It gives me a chance to still get excited about competing. It offers me the childlike "coolness" of wearing a new team jersey. It makes each of us practice what we have preached to our kids who all play hockey, "work hard, do your best and have fun!" For as we have learned from Danny MacLean, the "Voice" and "Heart" of this event, there are no winners or losers at the games, only one team that scores more goals.

However, in the end, it is the people of Plaster Rock, and the participating players from all over the world, who descend upon this story book village each year, that make this tournament what it is.

It is Danny Braun, with no voice left, staying up with you to the wee hours talking about the incredible work of the volunteers and his amazement of how this event has grown from its humble beginnings.

It is Todd Gamblin, carefully working on the ice sculpture; playing goal in the alumni game and taking the time to chat on the pond with me in between games, introducing me to other volunteers and thanking me for being a part of it!

It's enjoying the genuine friendship and hospitality of our hosts, Glenna and Earlen Baker at their lovely home, Baker's Bed and Breakfast and coming home to hot stew after a game on the pond!

It's catching up with past competitors who have become friends; like the Yanks, the Raggedy Ass River Boys, Lady Speedstick, the Easton Express and the Bermuda Triangles (and this year pausing to remember and honor, their great captain, Tom MacNeil, who passed on so suddenly, last April 2008).

It's getting to meet new teams and make new friends after an honest 30 minute battle that always ends with a smile, a handshake and a picture!

It's keeping the dream alive of playing here in the future with our sons.

Finally, the experience of the World Pond Hockey Championship is walking outside the beer tent at midnight and seeing the freshly flooded empty rinks bounded by snow, and feeling that kid-like anticipation that you can't wait to play again tomorrow. It is looking up at the clear black sky pierced by snow covered pine trees that surround the lake (alright I had to go to the bathroom too!), and whispering a prayer of thanksgiving for just being alive, for being in Plaster Rock , for having the privilege of playing in the greatest pond hockey tournament in the world! See you in February '09!

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