



With apologies to Sydney Harris and all of my Teachers of English.

I fully suspect that all of my childhood memories of playing hockey outdoors are clouded with some degree of fantasy. There is no possible way that we won every game. It all started at Tarbutt Park in Fort William, Ontario. If I remember correctly, this is where some of the fantasy may leak into the story; there was a smallish ice area with no boards for the "learn to skate" crowd. There were two other real rinks with boards and lines and lights. It was on these rinks that I learned one of hockey's greatest lessons - Respect the game.

The first rink was home to all the "little kids". They ranged in age from ten to fifteen. More importantly, they were all of similar skill. The games would start right after school and we would play until the bells on the United Church would ring at 5:45 PM. The bells were the signal for someone to announce "next goal wins". At this point, we would score and head home before the bells finished ringing at 6:00 PM. The game was simpler back then. We settled our own disagreements. The players respected the game and each other. Smaller, younger and weaker players were protected. We did not require Officials and we definitely did not require Administrators. We did not require Administrators creating structure for us. If the score in any one game became one sided, we would stop the game, "trade" a few players and balance the teams. Too simple. In fact, the only adult that I can recall was Don "Soupy" Campbell. He worked for the city and he would flood the ice at the end of the night to have it ready for the next game seven. Everyone of the players on the little kid's rink would secretly dream of the day when you would get "the call" The day when one of the big kids would come over to our rink and say "Hey kid, come play with us!" The chance to play on the big rink with the big kids; a dream come true. The game would become a delicate balance of trying to prove you belonged combined with making sure you passed the puck to the good players. The last thing you wanted was to be a puck hog and have some bigger kid come over and adjust your attitude by whacking you with a stick, punching you in the mouth or worse, sending you back to the little kid's rink. Very special memories indeed.

Our first experience with the World Pond Hockey Championships took me back to the wonderful days of my youth. Four forty-something guys, driving to Plaster Rock. Exchanging stories on how we got started in this wonderful game. Going over strategy. Predicting the weather. This year will be our fourth trip to the event. What we look forward to most is the people. The games, the players, the beer tent, the atmosphere and the hospitality. We have been very fortunate. The opportunity to trade sweaters, trade coats and most importantly, trade stories. Our team has made some great friends. Randy Crawford of Plaster Rock has treated us to some amazing hospitality. The people of Plaster Rock are great. It is difficult to put into words the experience. Suffice to say, everyone that has attended the World Pond Hockey Championships wants to return and they are constantly bragging about the experience. For those of us that have been lucky enough to attend, we understand. For everyone else that has a passion for the game of hockey, stand in line to get in, as it bigger and better than any of your expectations. It is that simple. Thank you Danny Braun and all of your volunteers. Thank you.

Respectfully
Hockey Administrator and WPH player
Brian Whitehead