

Thanks Coach!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

We don't often ?go back in time? in the newspaper business, but somehow this past weekend seemed to present a prime opportunity to do so. It was Thanksgiving weekend, a time for many of us to gather with our family and friends, or with good friends who have become family. As well, it was an opportunity for the good folks who give back to the community by volunteering their time at a food bank, community kitchen or local church that provides meals to those less fortunate. We should all be grateful and thankful for those that give back in such a way, alongside our feelings for our own family and friends. Not yet mentioned however, is another group of people for whom we should all be grateful, and that's the folks who sacrifice their time, energy, and skill sets to coach our kids in sports.

Have you said ?Thanks Coach? lately? Perhaps in the spirit of thanksgiving, you should.

I'm singling out coaches today because over the Thanksgiving weekend some of us were given sombre pause to recall not just the blessing of our family and friends, but also the impact of those who have had a different kind of impact on our children's lives along the way ? coaches.

When we think of community volunteers the ones who often come to mind are members of organized groups like Lions Club, Rotary International or Kin Canada, or the kind of people like those mentioned in our opening paragraph. Indeed, so they should, because each in their own way does amazing things in our community. But what about those men and women who sacrifice countless hours every, single, week (and weekends and long weekends too) coaching our kids?

These are the people we might rightfully refer to as unsung heroes, not doing what they do for name recognition, but rather, to impart a particular set of skills and knowledge on to our children; whether that's hockey, baseball, soccer, dance, gymnastics ? you name it. It's also true to say of these deeply committed people that they aren't just teaching a skill, but very often they're imparting life skills, too. They can have a profound and lasting influence on our children well into adulthood. Whether they are sharing technical skills or life skills, these ?other adults? in our children's lives are a part of building the framework that helps to shape what kind of adult they will become.

As an example, a coach (and I'm speaking from personal experience here) might offer some great hockey insights, but just as often teach the young adults in their lives far more than that.

For example, important life skills like shaking hands with your elders, removing ball caps when dining in a restaurant and always holding the door open for those who come behind you. These things aren't just good manners, nor ?old-fashioned,? no. Rather, no matter where you hail from, they are the kinds of truths about human behaviour that just make living in a community that much nicer. It's called having common courtesy and sometimes these days that feels sadly lacking. When you have an individual who cares not just about imparting hockey smarts, but also life skills, it's refreshing. Competition is important and learning about winning and losing is a life skill in and of itself, but coaches are often providing so much more along the way.

In the past I've been heavily involved in soccer and hockey in one capacity or another, for many years. My experiences were, without a doubt, positive and primarily focussed on doing what we could to make the experience of being involved in sport a positive one for the children and youth involved. But throughout those experiences, one thing stood out over and over and over again: that so many people are willing to give so much of their time as coaches, for the benefit of your kids and mine, with zero expectation of thanks.

They do it for the love of sport, and to help a kid master a new skill set. But perhaps even more important, along the way, they help kids and youth to learn about the importance of teambuilding, cooperation, working with others towards a common goal, celebrating success and managing failure. Skills that will carry your kid not just through their next hockey or soccer season, but throughout life.

Sometimes they even influence the direction of the adults sitting on the sidelines, myself included. While working at another (now defunct) newspaper, for several years I took a stab at writing for the sports pages based on my own experiences with a local hockey team. I don't think I can lay claim to an illustrious career as a sports writer, but it did lead, at least in part, to where I am today.

Back to Thanksgiving.

Perhaps for some readers you spent your Thanksgiving weekend at some tournament or another. You did it for the sake of your kid, but the coach? Sure, sometimes they have a kid on the team, too, but they volunteered their time to coach and also gave up their Thanksgiving weekend to do it. If you're lucky (and we often were) maybe the kids and all the parents of the team your kid plays on have become a second set of family and friends. You're even luckier if some of those friendships outlast the season and turn into lifelong friendships instead.

We've experienced this and consider ourselves blessed. That is, at least in part, the reason why I wrote this particular column today. Because I too wanted to say thanks ? to the coaches who have enriched our lives in any number of ways. I hope you had a lot to be grateful for over this past Thanksgiving weekend and that you enjoyed spending time with family and friends. If one of the things you are also thankful for includes being grateful for an influential coach in your child's life, (or your own!) it's still not too late to say, ?Thanks Coach.?

With fond memories, this column is specifically dedicated to some very special individuals we've met along the way including the man who may not have said it first, but to us, he said it best: ?You miss 100% of the shots you don't take!?