



Hockey Ends

As a family, we have lived and breathed hockey for the last 10 years. Not just the organized activities of our local association, but the frozen Pond my kids learned to skate on, community rinks, watching the Gophers and Bulldogs and Huskies and even the Wild.

We cleaned up the Pond tonight, and tomorrow or the next night we'll flood and put out the boards and lights. It's a neighborhood tradition, and with a new crop of little nippers coming along, the Pond will entertain yet another generation of skaters. Often the adults get involved, and there has been no more satisfying experience than watching adults and teens down to the tots on double-runners trying their hand at playing the game.

It's all good.

My son has been the big hockey player, but after a dismal year with a coach more interested in himself and his kid than the team – he was done. Benched for scoring goals instead of dumping the puck in the zone and setting up an offensive zone strategy that surprisingly enough never scored a goal all season; benched for grabbing the puck and then scoring goals short-handed instead of playing "The Box"; benched for congratulating other players who did neat and sometimes crazy things (playing Pond Hockey). He had enough of organized hockey.

Bantams was over. It was either high school hockey or Junior Gold. He had been at the last couple of Junior Gold tournaments that I worked, witnessed the fighting, swearing and all-around dismal behavior. It was a real turn-off for someone who loves the game. Looking at our local high school team, and the history, he has chosen to pursue other athletics. He wants to win and have fun.

He is busy this winter, and is unquestionably in the fittest and toughest condition of his young life. He is getting recognition and accolades for his effort and determination (mostly learned and then honed on the rink), and will do well with his new sport.

Would he have made the school team? I think so.

Did he want to even try? No.

It makes a lifetime hockey guy like myself wonder about the direction of our sport. Unlike the hockey parents at work, who were outraged that my son would "quit", I asked a few questions, satisfied myself that he had good reasons and decent motivation, and supported his decision.

I'm sure our Pond will see plenty of activity this winter, and I know that overall the lessons of hockey have been good for my son. Its kind of a shame to see organized hockey activity cease at age 16 – just when he's starting to get good....

Name withheld by request: