

February 11, 2015

Al McDonald, Vice President
North Halton Girls Hockey Association

Dear Al McDonald:

Good day for Girls Hockey?

I am a hockey parent. Not just any parent but the proud father of his daughter playing her first year of hockey at the age of nine. Of our three children, none showed any interest in wanting to play hockey when asked through their years of growing. I understand, it's not for everyone. I on the other hand have experienced hockey from many different views and levels while growing up and into my adult years. I played for 12 years, refereed for 10 years and have coached through the ranks up to the Provincial Junior 'A' Level. So as each year passed and as my children continued to show no interest in joining and learning to play hockey I felt that my children were missing out on some fantastic life experiences by not playing. Then when our youngest child came up to me last summer with absolute conviction and demanded that she "*wanted to play hockey this year!*" I was so very happy for her (and a little for *me!*). I also had my reservations as I knew the majority of the other girls would likely have several years of hockey playing experience ahead of her. I was concerned she would lose interest rapidly because she had zero hockey knowledge, and limited skating ability having only successfully completed a Can-Skate program to her repertoire from several years back.

So our experience with the Twisters began;

Prior to registering I was informed by another Twister hockey parent that the Twisters have a 'Friend Request Program'. Simply put - "**a returning Twisters player has a friend register who is new to the Twisters. For the friend request to be honoured, both the returning player and the new player must request to be on a team together**". What a concept! This got us off to a great start. As I found out later this offered program was the sole reason why my daughter said she wanted to play. To have her feelings of nervousness subdued in this manner was incredible – a great start indeed!

During the first 6-7 practices a bevy of Hockey School Instructors ran the practices. This was provided by the Twisters Association as an added benefit of registering and playing hockey within the organization. I was astonished to see a House League Program offering this as included in the cost of registration. Right off the bat it was apparent how many girls at the Atom age level were like my daughter and brand new to the sport. Those initial practices were instrumental in helping all these girls hit the ground running, or in this case – hit the ice skating. The improvement in all these girls in the first month to month in a half was unbelievable. The work ethic expectations of the Instructors was set, and it was set at the exact same level for every girl in the league at the same time. It was, as I'm sure it was intended, as if all the girls were attending a Hockey School to improve their ability and at the same time. What an idea – improve the league not just the player!

In addition to the skills being learned through hard work during the practices, my daughter also began the ever-evolving routine of growing her (as I like to call it) 'friend-pool'. She loves to be 'Social' and has made some very new friends this season. I am sure some of the teammates will continue to grow with her in life as friends and others as opponents in future years. To this day the House League team continues to build an amazing level of comradery both on and off the ice. This comradery building is an important life intangible that is impossible to duplicate for my child outside of the school setting unless you introduce them to organized sports of some kind. This 'comradery' is a natural phenomenon which occurs in team environment that has given my child true feelings of meaning, purpose and belonging. It truly puts a smile on my face watching and listening to her talk about and show how proud she is to be a part of and contribute to a team atmosphere.

Initially my daughter started out as a winger. (It was the safest place to have her play as she had no concept of the rules of hockey – I know, I know....I'm a bad Canadian parent!). As the weeks of practices and games went by she gradually became more understanding of the flow of the game, the rules and even picked up on and discussed some strategy. Our Coach Kevin (Coach of the decade as far as I am concerned) had mentioned to the team in a meeting at the beginning of the year that because we didn't have a full time goalie that each girl had the opportunity to take a turn playing in goal unless they did not want to. My daughter was horrified! She told me immediately that she did not want to take a turn in net. I calmed her down and suggested that she at least experience it before arriving at the belief that she would not like it. Ahhhh, one of our first

hockey bonding conversations that I will never forget. I will never forget it because when it came to be her turn in net, as nervous as she was, she played well above her expectations. She discussed how she felt afterwards. Exhilarated, full of excitement! She actually said that she felt as if she 'contributed to the game' that day. At that moment I felt a high level of confirmation that as parents we were doing the right thing by having our daughter play hockey. She then asked the Coach if it were possible that she could be the 'Full Time' goalie for her House League Team – another life lesson, Commitment.

As the season rolled along we were told about upcoming Tryouts for the Atom DS Team. My daughter expressed her interest in wanting to try out for the team as a goalie. In my 'supportive' way I explained to her the possibility of not making the team but I emphatically said we are going to give it our best shot! She was one of 2 goalies that tried out and subsequently made the team. Making this team strengthened her confidence and intensified her commitment to becoming the best she could be through hard work and determination. The team has had its lows and highs. It has also duplicated the comradery I spoke of earlier while increasing her intensity of competition – which she appears to thrive on. A side of her I had yet to experience. Thank you.

On average we received 1 game and 1 practice a week at the House League level and about a practice a week plus 8 exhibition games at the DS Level in addition to multiple Tournaments for each Team/Level. Unbeknownst to me, the Twisters also had a plan to help my daughter be the best that she could be. As a first year goalie at the age of nine she has a lot to learn. The House League program offered a series of Goaltending Training Sessions with *real* Goalie Instructors held at the leisure pad in Acton. This was offered at no additional cost to the participants – A House League offering Goalie Training, amazing! Then the Twisters DS team offered 5 x ½ hour 1-on-1 Goaltending Training Sessions at UHT. Also offered at no cost to the participants – This was a totally awesome experience! Then if that was not enough we also had a series of Power Skating Sessions with the DS Team that included all the players. The Training provided was remarkably influential in the growth of each of these girls from the beginning of the season to now and was entirely unexpected from a first year hockey parent.

The parents of the DS Teams were asked to offer comment on the styling of the New Uniforms for the Novice and Atom Teams a few weeks after receiving them. I can say that when I first saw them I was literally blown away by the design and quality of them. They are incredible! The girls are proud to wear them. Parents of opponents have commented on how great they look. I for one think they are very cutting edge and I love them!

My daughter has a couple of friends that are girls playing in a boy's hockey Association. I know the parents well enough to be comfortable asking them why they choose to have their daughters play within the boy's Association rather than with the girl's? The answers I have been given have not been very convincing to me that they have made the right choice. Without getting into details I asked myself, "Why should my daughter play in the Twisters organization?" Well, with the information contained in this letter I ask, "Why not?"

Good day for Girl's Hockey?

I'd say it's more like "A Great Day for Girl's Hockey!"

Sincerely,

A 1st Year Twisters Hockey Parent