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Giving kids an amazing experience



Jamie Fick and his coaching staff motivate the Belle River Minor Atom AE Hockey team during the pre-game skate.

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As parents continue to spend disposal income on rising registration fees in youth sports, they are for the most part, hoping the investment will pay off and their child will gain a great sport experience.

Like it or not, that experience is often dependent on the quality of the coach your child is assigned.

Great coach. Great year. Wrong Coach. Rough year.

Season to season, for a parent, this can be like playing sport lottery. "Will this year be the year my child has a great coach and amazing experience?" "Or will this be another disaster?"

This is especially true in travel Hockey where coaching horror stories are often shared at the preferred watering local watering hole, at a table in corner with a flickering light in hushed voices. "I had this one coach, this one year, he was brutal..."

Every once a while, a parent however does hit the jackpot and comes across an outstanding coach. A real good smart coach, who gets the big picture of youth sport. Who is there for the child. To create the experience. Not just the result. And you are quickly reminded of why you traded that new flat screen TV fund, to pay another year of Hockey fees. Be-

cause your kid is happy and you know why.

Jamie Fick and his coaching staff, lead the Belle River Minor Atom AE Hockey team, and have managed to provided a group of nine and ten year-old kids, a year they will remember for a long time.

The team is made up of a mix ability, nine and ten year-old boys and one outstanding girl; Ashley, the lone female defender, who helps anchor a group of gritty, feisty and spirited boys, who, for the most part made the team because they were all cut from the AA team.

Try, Try again!

Fick constantly assures them, that his purpose is to give them the training they need to "go out next try outs and try again". "You're here so you can get some training to keep going next year."

On Thurs. Feb. 2, Fick's team beat the favored Windsor Jr. Spitfires 1-0 to win the semi final Bluewater OMHA series 3-1. Belle River Hockey Travel program had three Atom travel teams in these playdown series - only Fick's remains in contention. The team now advances to play a series against 1st place Tecumseh for the finals. But win or lose this coming series, it really isn't the success on the scoreboard that is causing all the buzz around this little engine that could team story. Quite frankly it has nothing to do with their recent wins.

The elation is coming from all about the experiences they were given this past year.

First there's the cheer contest. The team was selected by the NHL and Hockey Night in Canada Roger's Hometown, as the Essex County pregame cheer winners. Before each game, the kids sit on their benches in the dressing room and listen to a recording of short sound bites from every great coaching movie ever.

Think Al Pacino from Any Given Sunday and Kurt Russell from the Miracle, all set to techno/inspirational music that would make anyone want to jump off their sofa and go battle a Viking army.

When that's done, Fick gives them a prepared speech with the games expectations and key coaching points. He focuses on the positive from the game before and his coaching staff give their specific advice before putting up the volume on his PA system, grabbing a microphone and with the help of epic background music, giving them the starting line up in the greatest movie trailer-esque voice he can muster. Kids go berserk. When that's done, the coaches step back, And the team's 10year old captain get's them in a huddle and together they sing out, their award winning cheer:

*This I know and this I say
I'll play my very best each day
What flows true, north strong and free
Belle River does, you and me.*

And then proceed to jump up and down screaming Habs at the top of their lungs.

All this and the game hasn't even started.

To read about this is one thing, but to see it is something else.

This message is amazing for kids

The lyrics were written by John Nabben, a teacher with the GECDSB, and a member of Fick's coaching staff, as a way of ensuring the core values that the team upholds are front and center in the hearts and minds of the players before each game. Former NHL defensemen Ed Jovanovski and Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens both remarked "this message is amazing for kids".

Then the players, with their skates tied and jerseys down to their knees, make their way to the rink, at which

point, the team's manager plays a voice recording of the Toronto Maple Leaf NHL Air Canada Center Announcer, introducing each player one at a time, as they skate around the ice, with more excitement than a Cedar Point roller coaster. Parents cheering as their child's name is listed and kids beaming with pride.

This sets the tone for giving these players an experience. Recognition for a season of, balanced and fair play. All the kids played. All the kids improved.

It's no wonder the team is winning games. They love playing. They're playing for each other because they are having fun. The fun is reflected in the experiences, the memories collected year long.

Sure, the minutes each player varies for a play off game or two, but there is doubt watching the kids, that they love to play.

In addition to Hockey Hometown glory, they have been to Niagara Falls, Cincinnati. Ohio, they have celebrated birthdays, holidays and you tube videos. They have answered coach's challenges (like 100 shots on a net at home), and have organized team dinners. Parent vs Player hockey games and a huge Christmas party.

Every team will have their share of personality conflicts and parents who can't handle how much playing time their child gets or doesn't get in any particular game. You can't escape that. Parents complain. But more often or not, those complaints fall on deaf ears, when, in the end, the experience of being part of something special, the smiles of the faces of young players, should only remind their parents, that the experience, the amazing experiences coaches like Jamie Fick provide, is priceless.

Fick and his staff, have certainly made that their mission this past season. Giving kids amazing experiences. You can't put a price tag on that. We hope he will for years to come.