

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: "Old Timers" Hockey

By Stephen Somerville

As one who tries to keep the effects of getting older at bay for a little while longer, I play some (very bad) hockey. I am fortunate as I get on the ice twice per week; once as part of the Aurora "Church Dodgers" over-fifty team on Tuesday evenings, and the other during Sunday afternoon organized pickup games.

What follows is a partial transcript of the conversation I had with a player on my Sunday pickup team a while back:

Stephen: What's this on my shirt?

Other Player: Somerville, we haven't even got on the ice yet and you're already complaining. Sorry that you didn't get the "C", but we were thinking of giving you an "A" for (can't print this due to The Auroran being a family newspaper but the seven-letter word used has the same last four letters as foxhole. You get the picture.)

Stephen: Thanks for that Mr. X. No, I am not complaining about my lack of team status, but how come my shirt has a small patch on the front that says "old timer"? I don't mind if it says "terrible player wears this shirt", but not "old timer." I only want to be called an old timer when I can get into the movies cheaply or get my hair cut at a reduced rate.

In the game that followed, I was slightly taken into the boards by some young kid, and he then leans over to help me up and says, "Sorry sir, are you all right?"

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

For our organized "pickup" hockey games on Sunday afternoons, we don't have referees or timekeepers or scorekeepers.

One of the guys acts as a convenor, and instead of throwing the sticks in the middle of the ice as we used to do as kids to determine the teams, he chooses the sides while we are in the dressing room.

We have about twenty guys, all shapes, sizes, ages and levels of ability ranging from not very good (moi) to guys who played Junior "A" hockey.

One of our players, Gord, has a special combination of power and speed, and I am thankful he takes it easy on us.

I have been playing with this group for the past eight years or so and have never had a more enjoyable experience.

The guys are funny, and just like the eight-year-old boys we used to be, we still like to use a little trash talk.

And we still have the enthusiasm of youth.

We forget all our cares and concerns for that one hour. And what a glorious hour it is.

What I appreciate most is no coach yelling, "Somerville, for the love of God, would you pretend to back-check just once this season?", or my all-time favourite, "Somerville, these are not ceremonial face-offs, you are actually allowed to win one of them, you know?"

We always kid each other that if you don't play well, you will be sent down. Leaf players can get sent down to the Marlies; the only thing lower than our league is public skating!

And having your friends as the goalies is always great for the ribbing and bragging rights that goes on during the rest of the week.

That hour is like the fountain of youth "carefree and fun. I wouldn't miss it.

Just don't call me an "old timer".

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