

Inspirational ringette teaches teamwork

While visiting the Western Regional finals for ringette last weekend, I found a wonderful game, enthusiastic participants and dedicated volunteers, some of which have devoted 17 years to the kids. As I sit down to write this column, I am thinking about human rights.

Minor sport provides a venue, albeit somewhat contrived, that should allow individuals to test their limits without some of the negative aspects of society such as discrimination.

To our shame, society continues to discriminate on the basis of colour, ethnicity, disability and gender. At a bare minimum, we should be able to provide all children with playing surfaces that are without these indignities.

I have always been concerned about our responsibilities and the need to provide sport that is free from bias. I don't think we do enough.

I am frequently disheartened by the incidents of bias that continue to occur in all our public institutions, the workplace and in our daily life. After my visit to the ringette tournament last Saturday, my heart felt a little lighter.

Sometimes it's the acts of everyday people that make a difference. As important as it was, we don't have to "March on Montgomery" to change the world. We can do it a bit at a time. We can volunteer or do what Sam Jacks did in 1963.

Jacks, the director of recreation for the city of North Bay, was concerned about the lack of skating games for



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KEEPING SCORE

girls. He believed that they should have an opportunity to play an ice sport.

After inventing floor hockey in 1936, he went on to invent the game of ringette and made a difference. Today, it's a national and international sport.

All ages have the opportunity to compete. The oldest player at the Guelph tournament was in her 60s. Although the game is dominated by females there are also a small number of males who play.

I asked 14-year-old Lauren and 15-year-old Danielle about the game and they called it an "awesome sport" while also telling me that "girls were tougher than boys, trust me." I don't know why but my wife agrees with them.

The president of the Guelph Ringette Association, Marvin Stemeroff, took some time to introduce me to the game and to the rules that make this game different. Many games stress teamwork but this sport actually requires it as part of the rules.

Players use a stick to pass a rubber ring to other members of their team.

The rules require that players pass the ring over each of the two blue lines as they head to the other team's net. The ring cannot be taken over the blue line by any player. It must be passed. As a consequence of this and a few other rules, success in a game is directly related to teamwork and passing.

This fast-paced game also frowns on intentional body contact. Despite this, players are in full padded gear and helmets.

Stemeroff summarized the game into three principles. He stated that it involves "spirited competition." Through a sense of fairness, there is the thrill of winning and the solace of losing. He also stated that it emphasized the "value of teamwork" in its rules; no single player can carry the ring from one end of the rink to the other since they must pass the ring. No hogs on the ice in this sport.

Finally, he proposed that the sport also emphasizes "individual growth and development." Within the emphasis on team play, the individual can learn to excel and develop all the skills involved in the game.

In our local communities and through minor sport, we can promote equality and teach those values that are so elusive in the other parts of our lives. It's about making a difference.

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