

## Power and Glory Amen

Although sports seem to be worshipped in Raymond, it is considered a second religion. With the majority of the population being LDS members, the community can't help but be influenced by the religion. Most events are planned equally around the church and sports calendars. Not all players are church goers, but the LDS kids are taught discipline and to build faith by: praying, reading scriptures and obtaining wholesome values. Often teams will say a prayer prior to games and when travelling, they will try to make it home by Saturday night for some to attend church on Sunday.

Some from the LDS faith might not appreciate putting their personal lives under a microscope to reveal secrets behind this town's sports phenomenon, because of media reflecting negative, even inaccurate messages about the LDS church. Therefore it is almost a duty to send out a message about the positive outcomes from this lifestyle and how the youth benefit from the religious lessons taught.

The vices they try to avoid such as: harmful substances, alcohol, tobacco, coffee, premarital sex, stealing or swearing, supposedly make you weaker players. Even teammates will not appreciate one indulging and weakening the team, because nothing should jeopardize playing at your maximum level. Although self-discipline is part of the qualities learned, to alleviate temptation, there has never been liquor sold in Raymond. It is a dry town.



**2009 RAYMOND COMETS GIRLS RUGBY TEAM**

Although the high school claims there is a separation of church and state, they do have a rule in place, that if you smoked or drank you get suspended or kicked off the team. The outside world may view this as overly-strict, but Raymond doesn't care. How many other athletes get measured or judged by their religious beliefs? Raymond kids are taught to handle it, carry that weight.... and it just makes their shoulders bigger for the frontline.

They are not meant to be portrayed as sweet, innocent little boys and girls, as some are far from

perfect and if they need to get mean to win – they will. It is especially seen in the transformation of the young women from their Sunday-best, to the tackling monsters on the rugby field. It's astounding!

Strong work ethic is something else installed in them. This may have derived from being a hard working farming community, and many players do off-season agriculture and outdoor jobs. Lethbridge College Kodiak basketball player and past Comet Nick Demas made a comparison, "I lived in the city (Edmonton) and it was different there. Kids seemed to stay in more and play more video games, where here in a small town, people work harder and don't mind helping other people in the community. Just like in sports, you don't just show up, it takes a lot of work to get there."

Fairbanks added, “Being raised here you did what you were told to do by parents. There were no options and you didn’t argue. You literally thru bales in the summer, and I always had good leg and core strength for football season.” He also noted, “As a coach in ten years, I noticed a distinct drop off in the core strength of kids. Even farm kids now make big round bales and have front end loaders, so they don’t throw bales for hours. Can it be replaced by gyms? No, I just don’t think you can discipline yourself enough to do it consistently.”

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Gibb reflects back to coaching basketball and the church connection. “Discipline is very important and the kids here learn to obey. One game, I was down to five guys playing our third overtime. I called a timeout and was telling them you are going to do exactly what I tell you to do and gave them the play.” He added, “This player Bobby Milner said ‘Coach Gibb could we have another word of prayer before we go’.... and I said ‘HELL NO... The Lord expects you to do something - now you get out there and perform. Don’t rely on him!’ We got the last basket and won.”

The most obvious connection to the LDS church is that nearly every building has a basketball gym inside it, with folding doors that open for overflow seating. Also the popular Raymond Christmas tradition, a two day tournament called the ‘Sugar Bowl’ starting on Boxing Day. Half the town will pass up turkey leftovers and laying on the couch for attending basketball games to converse or ‘coach from the sidelines’. Missing the Sugar Bowl is like missing Christmas Dinner.

So a big question is: if there is a church connection, why does Raymond still win over towns in Southern Alberta with similar LDS backgrounds?

Lloyd Fairbanks answered, “Cow Eyes! My observation is many opponents we play have “cow eyes” - you know the look cattle get when they are at the slaughterhouse. You see them try to put on a front, but realistically they knew what was going to be unleashed on them.” He adds, “They don’t have that killer instinct; to go for the juggler! When you got them down- choke them until they stop breathing.



**THE LDS STAKE CENTRE WHERE THE SUGAR BOWL IS HELD**