

The Spirit of Competition

By Laureen Heggie

The secluded town of Raymond, Alberta sits tucked away against the Milk River Ridge, although secluded, not insignificant; more like a hidden guard dog ready to veraciously pounce out and attack unsuspecting prey. When it comes to sports, not many opponents have left the scrap yard without a scratch, handing over titles repeatedly to Raymond's high school team, the Comets.

In this community, with agricultural and God Fearing roots, the 'Game of Life' is not a spectator sport, there is a commitment of high standards to uphold, results of a high ranking reputation year after year! This incentive has led them to produce a few professional athletes and to capture as many as 43 Provincial titles, including five in 2009 where they dominated in basketball, football, rugby and rodeo.

Pride brings one third of the town out to watch the home games, sporting the traditional red and white colours with pom-poms, face paint and even old high school jerseys of the alumni. Many in the community have given their blood and sweat to carve out this winning tradition, so they support the humble school of approximately 200 students, as they repeatedly kick prairie dust over opposing towns and city teams.

What makes their triumph amazing is that they beat larger schools from Calgary and Edmonton with the advantage of choosing from 2,000 plus students; culling out the weaker players and moulding the cream of the crop into a top team. At Raymond High, with only 10% student body comparatively, they struggle for choice and work with what they have.

So many people want to know the enigma of this triumphant town. Is it due purely to a successful program? Or is it in the water? If the water can be credited for fueling the Raymond gene pool for years, then that is part of the winning formula – for it's not something tangible, it is a quality bred into these kids long ago. The precedence was set, and the only way to show gratitude to the legacy, is to keep it intact!



THE YEAR OF THE CHAMPIONS: The Raymond Comets won 5 provincial championships during the 2008/2009 school year.

Well known past basketball coach Bob Gibb commented, "This program has been handed down for years; from the beginning of time in this town, where they were disciplined, devoted and loyal. They were fighters and thought about it 24 hours a day. These kids desire to do their best..... they just have a better higher level best than most towns."



Seventeen year pro football veteran and past coach Lloyd Fairbanks added, "I've been asked what the secret is by reporters for years, everyone wants you to sum it up in one sentence. It's not like, well every Saturday we get together and drink this miracle water." He continued, "I haven't seen anything in Canada like this, it is more of an American mentality, like West Texas basketball and football mania. There is a level of expectation here and the players even expect it from themselves. I have never had a problem with motivating kids here."

Although the attitude in Raymond may come off as arrogant, it really stems from well deserved confidence. But with success, a price is often paid. The community, who are often judged harshly for their over-obsession of sports, trickles into other areas reflecting on their religious beliefs as a result. There is a high population of members of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). If there is a connection or influence from the church, it should be viewed in a positive light for producing generations of disciplined, dedicated athletes.

Comets girls basketball coach Karie Baldry addressed the subject by saying, "It is a very unique situation here and I wish more people would feel the positive ripples from striving for excellence, as the rewards are so beneficial. I feel like we here are very misunderstood by the outside world that say 'all Raymond cares about is winning', and that is not true. Winning is a bi-product of what we really care about."

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**-Lloyd Fairbanks,
17 year Raymond pro football player**



**Lloyd during his
earlier football days**

In this town, it's all about accomplishment; to push themselves as far as they can with an aggressive, fearless determination. Two words can sum up the drive here.... Tradition and Expectation! How is this consistently carried through generations in today's challenging, modern world? You just can't buy tradition, and it works here because this town values it; like an antique piece of furniture.... and the support of the alumni will buff and polish to make sure it survives.