

## Parents With Pom-Poms

The majority of Raymond children are raised in humble, well grounded homes. Some are taught the gospel, good morals and high standards in everything they do. Passed down from previous generations, this structured foundation helps the youth to; hold positive attitudes, strive for perfection, have strong work ethic and respect discipline..... which are all desirable elements in sports.

Although most kids are encouraged to play sports, high achievements are also made in the arts and academic areas. Those kids will then attend the sports events to support the home team. The support system here is almost as important as the players themselves, The town people will travel into the city like a funeral procession on the highway for a high school game, or drive further for Provincials.

Being one of the only forms of entertainment in this modest town. children have grown up watching and learning from the games. As soon as they can hold a ball, they head behind the bleachers at a football game, decked out in oversize t-shirts or jerseys - pretending to be their favourite Comet. Or at a basketball game they count the clock down until the half time buzzer sounds, so they can run out on the court and shoot baskets.

The expression “It takes a Village...” is practiced everyday in Raymond. Many people move away, but they return to raise families for this reason. They don’t come back to this town with a population less than 4,000 to get rich, and some even sacrifice job status just to live a good life here. It is definitely the ‘Who you know to get ahead’ system in this town, but once a kid gets their foot in the door and prove themselves on the court, the name hierarchy is bypassed.

“My biggest heartbreak is having grandkids playing in other competing towns, but their dad is teaching them the same mentality so they are playing like Raymond players,” Gibb admits. “But it’s like sharing some of our little secrets with others. I will not cheer for those grandkid’s teams – but I will cheer for them when they get a basket.”

Some people come to resent the strong emphasize put on sports here because of the unbalance of support towards other children’s needs, as in the arts or academics. Although acknowledged, these kids are used to playing second fiddle; and by playing that instrument they may be more in tune with life, for it is a talent you may use the rest of your life. After you leave high school sports, you may hang up your gear forever.

High achieving students develop a kind of Rock Star Status in town. Sports enthusiasts dream of their children marrying other athletic stars and hope those athletic genes are productive to give birth to the future generation of Comets.

“When athletic family members marry the same, they are expected to produce great athletes.” Lloyd Fairbanks joked about the potential breeding program. “People like Bob Gibb probably have a bloodline chart on their wall at home, predicting upcoming Comet stars.”

So all joking aside, it could be a gene or a genetic component in the bloodlines here; mentally and physically. A form of mental programming so that past players can live vicariously through their kids, displayed often by annoying, yet passionate coaching from the sidelines.



**BOB GIBB**

Although Raymond is rich in success, it does come with a price.... but one that most parents are willing to pay. The big difference in this town to others is the sacrifice made for the over-excessive commitment. Boys know that their dreams of those mounted antlers get put on hold during hunting season, Christmas vacation can not jeopardize the Sugar Bowl basketball tournament and summer vacations get cut short for early football practice in mid-August. Those kids that had other obligations, usually are set behind.

Parents know that as soon as Grade 7, programs are created to take advantage of early development in sports and to plant the seed. By the time they reach high school they are fully prepared to hand them over to the coaches for the next five years as a Comet. Mother's joke about these expectations saying, "We only birth and feed them... the coaches raise them."



**PHIL TOLLESTRUP**

Also a parent has to accept, after putting in the same commitment as other players, your kid may sit the bench. It's an easy choice for a coach to sacrifice a player, before sacrificing the whole team. This is very humiliating for a kid with his family and friends watching and the confidence and self-esteem a parent has built up for years, can be damaged in one night. But isn't that life.... and it is life's pressures that shape you from carbon - into the diamond you become!

Coaches and players are willing to make a deep commitment here by passing up other activities and job opportunities. Phil Tollestrup commented on after school job conflicts. "Raymond practices 3:30-6:00 every night. A lot of kids in other towns or the city have jobs to help pay the bigger bills, so they can't show up for all practices." He added, "In Raymond, there are less costs (fewer needs for jobs), and there are penalties if you don't show up for practice."

RHS Vice Principle and boys basketball coach Todd Heggie said. "My kids would quit whatever they were doing to give 100% for my team, whether going to the gym to work out and make themselves better. There are maybe four practices in a year where someone misses and only because they are sick."

"Strong character is built here, where kids will naturally challenge each other and are passionate about competition,"



**ROBERT HEGGIE AT THE CALGARY STAMPEDE**

Robert Heggie past athlete, coach and pro rodeo competitor reveals. "There is always a friendly rivalry between friends and they push each other to their best potential. You can't be soft in this town or you get walked over by all the aggressive characters, and the respect level is just not there for under-achievers."

Tollestrup states the importance of rivalry, "Kids here are always playing for a slurpee or something so it's important to keep score while some places don't even do that anymore. I mean what's the point then. You need competitiveness – if not that's socialism or communism."

So does this obvious boldness make players confident or cocky?

Confidence is something installed, earned and passed on. Raymond is used to being judged, for being a small town, choice of religion and for being cocky or over-confident. But that's part of their secret... their hidden Ace. They travel to each game labelled with the underdog status, but with nothing to lose and lots to gain when they win. They eat it up, and it's sure a better option than being intimidated.

"Call it naivety, but they thought they were superman. A lot of the times they were almost ignorant, they just didn't know to be afraid," Fairbanks said. "They are confident, maybe a little cocky, but my experience is; our kids were humble enough to listen, but cocky enough to go out and perform it."

Coaches agree that the fear of failure will inhibit people from risking it all. Fear can either push you, or make you back off to avoid it. These kids are not afraid to try, because they truly don't believe they will fail. Even when there is talk of a weaker year, this fuels them to prove those negative-talkers wrong.

"Confidence is to be internally arrogant and just don't abuse it on the outside to others. Sure it has been earned, but in my opinion Raymond shouldn't go into games over confident because they can't afford to," stated Robert Heggie. "Every other team comes to play their best game trying to beat Raymond. If you play overconfident or cocky, a team or player will be complacent and not put forward his best game."



**RAYMONDS MOST DEDICATED FANS HOWARD HICKEN AND BILL NALDER BRAVE FREEZING TEMPERATURES AT A FOOTBALL GAME.**

The kids expect to win and don't accept losing, it is a foreign feeling to these warriors. They feel shame and will actually avoid people like the shunned on an Amish Colony, when they haven't lived up to the communities expectations. No one gets belittled for losing if you played your best, and they don't play the blame game, it just shocks them into reality that it can happen and propels them to try harder. Really the worst that happens is a common expression will be thrown at you: 'No one remembers second place'.

Large families with older siblings make you better, tougher players. Long-time friendships are formed and this creates close knit tough teams as Todd Heggie noticed. "These kids started playing together when young and some years they are so close you couldn't tear them apart. I can tell when a kid grows up somewhere else and comes here not until high school; there is not the same level commitment and bonding."

Fairbanks added, "They are tough kids here, you can't run home to Mommy expecting she's going to coddle you. She'll kick your butt and tell you to get back out there." He chuckles as he talks, "When football started here, I thought it was so fun to hit people; to feel somebody's air going out of them. The worst thing that could have happen is to give Raymond the Sportsmanship Trophy.... that's bad.... that's like kissing your sister!"