

No Cow-Eyes Coaching

Raymond throughout the years has been very lucky to have had great coaches. Most grew up there and were players, so know the program and the high expectations. They follow the foundational fundamentals but take the game to a more serious, intense level. Some coaches experienced a higher skill level playing on college teams and they intend to demonstrate it. Coaches here strive to be anything but average!

“I get criticized by other coaches saying ‘Well you’re doing the same thing they did twenty years ago’ and I say ‘yes, it worked then and it works now - we just beat you by thirty points,’” Todd Heggie stated. “We adapt as the game evolves; adding to it, but the general philosophies are carried on.”

Robert Heggie recalls some techniques, “It is important to perform basic fundamentals; like how to pass a basketball right, do a bounce pass, block your man out. In football timing is everything and repetition to be in the right spot at the right time.” He added, “Guys like Lloyd Fairbanks went pro and then brought back skills that took an already good program to a whole new level. Also we had coaches like Jim Ralph that could read another teams defence immediately, pick it a part, counter it and beat it.”

In Raymond, some don’t only become teachers to educate – they become teachers to coach. They admit to still being students of the game, continuing to learn all there is about the sport. It consumes a lot of time mentally preparing and studying other games; both live and on television.

“I focus on one game at a time; and this game is just a small bite. That’s why they don’t get intimidated about what is in front of them,” Baldry reflects. “I as a coach am looking four months down the line, so I don’t put that pressure on them too early. We have built this reputation, with people knowing you are aggressive and so they never give up. So you have this edge before you even start the game.”

When the Raymond decides to apply pressure, their signature is relentless game tempo. “Kids are so much more developed in skills nowadays, so to win a provincial title now is way harder. So we play just a notch above, in the best condition to have the stamina and work hard at being in full game tempo for 40 minutes,” Baldry explained. “If you play us, you better be ready to run. Same as defence, it is attack, attack, attack, and that wears people down.”

Phil Tollestrup added, “When I started coaching I always made sure they wouldn’t wear out and saved their best games for the playoffs. Stamina is so important and coaches here know speed will beat size every time, even up against these larger schools with big kids.” He added, “Even our little players will hit so hard the other teams can’t beat us. My brother (Wally) is a doctor and he said sometimes the other team’s kids get hurt, come into the hospital and nothing is wrong with them. They just don’t want to go back out because they got hit so hard.”

Coaches known to be motivators, could make a kid believe he was ready for the NBA, but at game time most agree to never ask them to do something that they haven’t been taught yet. It’s a coach’s job to prepare before the season even starts, and to know and adapt for the individuals he is going to work with.

“I believe sports are 80% mental and 20% physical. Against bigger teams, they outweigh us by size and during warm-up we look like we are going to get killed,” Ralph commented. “Then on paper our numbers are low against theirs, but in a challenge our kids believe they can, just don’t tell them they can’t. We will turn our kids away from other teams during warm-ups because they are yelling or flashing gestures; bullying and trying to intimidate us. He continued, “You can make anybody believe in themselves – we are the classic ‘Little Engine That Could’.”

But definitely a tough love transpires between coaches and players, and with that an equal respect develops. Some coaches feel that if they just ran tough practices and didn’t care, they wouldn’t get the effort from the kids. The kids know that by working the program, they are building character and because of this, they respect their coaches. In Raymond, you never question or talk back to a coach. Those that move in from other towns and try to back-talk or change the program – are usually shut-down real quick.

“By the time kids got to me in high school they are groomed to fit into the same program with the same ethics and out of a 200 kids I coached, 199 are respectful and listen.” Todd Heggie comments. “It’s so unique here, and even the B-line of kids are excellent players. The players who sit bench a lot were important because of their contribution at practice, and they are still building character.



2008 PROVINCIAL CHAMPS—RAYMOND COMETS

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“The drive they have installed in them is almost like brainwashing. It also affects them in their life after they leave here,” Heggie says admiringly. “They become pretty, good people and I think that is the reflection of the program.”

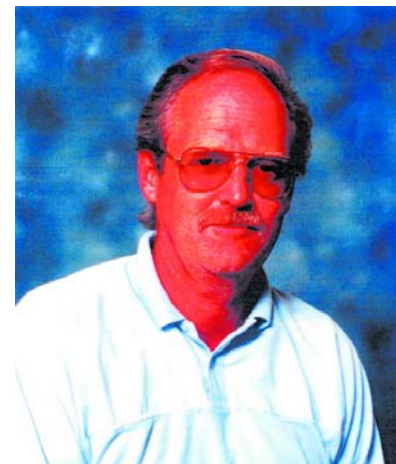
So who would ever want to sign up to coach and the pressures and criticism from town and parents? But belligerent criticizing from the stands is not tolerated, often resulting in removal from the gym. “We hand our kids over to a coach and we don’t interfere, he may not do everything you like, but you stay out of it and trust him to run the program,” Jim Ralph recalls. “There is supposed to be a respect and not challenge or criticize the coach although that is not always observed. When you are just being a spectator and questioning a coach’s decision, that’s fine even I do that. But to confront a coach and make it personal - that’s when you cross the line.”

Todd Heggie added, “A Key Component is community involvement. They give you input and I listen to people that I have respect for and might apply it. The ones that say things to be arrogant, I don’t.”

Coaches can be good role models too as Nick Demas reveals, “We trusted Todd Heggie and he knew he could trust us, and that’s what you need to be a good team. He’d set the tone and our train was rolling – there was no stopping us.” He recalled, “I was playing football at Calgary University and it was good but different. The Raymond comradery and chemistry was missing. It wasn’t the same as playing in Raymond in front of thousands of fans, looking up in the stands to familiar faces. It makes you play harder.”

Some of these coaches passed up positions at other high schools or colleges just to invest in this program but this also meant coaching your own kids, which is often a tough position to be in. To be responsible for any child's upbringing at all, is a huge undertaking. When asked about any regrets, coaching these players, there were a few.

"When we lost games I always remembered every dropped ball and that would keep me up at night. I didn't really congratulate my players enough for doing well. I almost let the compliment be my silence and not giving them heck," Brian Dudley remembers. "I've seen the other extreme where a kid gets patted on the back for doing something minor and insignificant, so that they thought they did something superior. And I've seen the results. You don't want to damage egos today, but you don't want to always pat them on back too much. Just always encourage them to do better."



BRIAN DUDLEY

Jim Ralph reflected, "I enjoyed working with kids and so many good memories of the comradery and the emotions. It is real sad at the last game of season and the last time a grade 12 kids takes off his uniform – knowing he will not put it on again." He admits, "When you coach your own kid then everyone thinks there is favouritism, but when some parents are asked to coach, they don't have time to donate. I regret being too hard on my own kids as I have mellowed. I realize that now, the expectations were always higher for them and their mistakes were always so magnified compared to other players."

Some of the best memories in Raymond for many are when everyone rushes the floor or field after winning Provincials. Also the memory of coming home on the bus and being greeted on the highway outside of Raymond by a fire truck, fireworks and 200 vehicles forming a parade in the team's honour. That alone, just to be appreciated, made it all worthwhile.



2009/10 RAYMOND COMETS BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

How long will this go on in today's changing world and shifting focuses? Baldry sums it up, "The harder you invest yourself in this the harder it is to let go of it. I worry about the future and demographics shifting. I see more kids with more apathy that don't care as much, although Raymond might hang on to it longer." She continues, "Family units are changing with not as much expectations put on kids; where parents upset with kids about poor grades, now get mad at the teachers. So there is some shifting in responsibility and expectations."

Regardless, one outside influence that Raymond would welcome, is the ultimate challenge of a Canadian National title. Although as it stands, they really don't need to prove anything. It seems everywhere you go, anywhere in this country, when you say you are from Raymond, they usually reply with; "Oh right, you're that little town that dominates in sports."