



## **Mining Parental Gold**

by Dan Bauer

Few, if any, athletic teams will go through an entire season without encountering obstacles. These hurdles can be injuries, internal confrontations, suspensions, scoring slumps and too often in today's landscape—parents.

From afar legendary Badger hockey coach Bob Johnson taught me many lessons including that as a coach you must expect adversity. His advice was to be prepared and to always find the silver lining that exists in every misfortune.

This season did not disappoint as our team endured the mid-season transfer of two teammates to our cross-town rival. These departures, more commonplace in Minnesota, but now spreading into Wisconsin, cannot be publically debated. It is a subject that has been ruled off limits by school administrations and the media. It is a Pandora's Box that nobody will open.

Losing teammates isn't something any team takes lightly. Having them leave voluntarily is an action that carries a psychological impact that can't be measured. Our team unity had been violated and teammates had been betrayed. This dual departure felt like a condemnation of a life's work. That was my emotional response to an unsettling turn of events.

In the middle of this nightmare, battling self-doubt and suppressing an intense animosity, something great began to happen. With my letter of resignation occupying space in my recent documents file, the glimmer of light I saw was not crossed hockey sticks burning in my front yard, but the glow of Johnson's fabled silver lining.

It began with our team pulling together and playing some of its best hockey of the year. They looked adversity straight in the eye and did the one thing I had hoped they would do—respond. It was one of those proud moments as a coach when you knew they had indeed been listening all this time and the life lessons you had been trying to instill in them had surfaced at exactly the right time.

As proud as I was of our team at that moment, something even better was building. It began as a trickle, a seemingly lonesome e-mail, a short phone call from a supportive parent. It culminated with a deluge of support and an overwhelmed coach. Badger Bob was right, not only was there a silver lining in this season's cloud of adversity, there was gold too, parental gold, and I had struck it rich once again.

It was a special feeling when I reaffirmed my belief that if you base your program on building character first, and you don't win as many games as the team across the bridge, good parents will stay in your corner. In a profession where you are primarily evaluated on your wins and

loses, it was exhilarating to know that developing character is still valued. It was heartening to know that everything you do as a coach doesn't simply come down to an agate of type in a weekly newspaper.

A coach's maiden name is their win-loss record. It is a marriage that never ends in divorce—the two are forever linked. For those who win it is a badge of courage and for those who don't it is a permanent L on your forehead. As a coach with the less fashionable label I have always been forced to look beyond the scoreboard. Whether that is a result of my coaching skills or too many seasons with limited resources is a question my subconscious mind constantly debates.

Fortunately for me, the majority of parents I have been involved with over the past thirty years have evaluated me on a deeper level than winning. When I left Spooner, I left a great group of parents that I never thought I would see the likes of again. Thankfully I was wrong. In Wausau I have found another core of parents with character and conviction.

Following the team's emotional first response came a brutal four game losing streak. When our ship began taking on the flood waters of doubt, this exceptional group of parents each grabbed a bucket. Their support and belief never wavered. As one parent put it, "the scoreboard is not a life's journey scoreboard, and if it was your team would be winning".

I have taken my shots at the crazy parents that do exist and I stand by those words. Good coaches continue to leave the game because of the unhealthy influence and irrational behavior of those parents. Sadly those troubling parents are on the rise, but they remain the minority. Quality parents are alive and well, they just get drowned out by the bad.

To all the good parents out there—stand up and let your coach know you are in their corner. If there is one thing we all need to know, it is that what we do matters and is appreciated. Good coaches build confidence and character in their players. Good parents recognize that effort and are able to re-focus their spotlight on the entire team and not just their child. Don't let the squeaky wheeled minority and their selfish agendas destroy your team or your coach.

Fanatical parents will unfortunately continue to drive good coaches out of the game, but on the eastside of Wausau there is a group of hockey parents that may have just kept this coach in the game a little bit longer.

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