



# SPECIAL ARTICLE

**"I had my guy!"**



Teach me!

## **"I had my guy ! Michigan Hockey**

By Lyle Phair

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Being involved in a team sport like hockey puts kids in an environment where they have the opportunity to learn many of life's lessons. And we all know that it is much easier to learn something when the activity you are involved in is one that you enjoy. So from that perspective, playing hockey can be very rewarding, and a great educational experience.

Of course, there is also the risk that they will learn some things that aren't so good as well. A prime example is "placing the blame, how not to accept responsibility or be accountable for your actions." Hockey is great for that one. Adults are great teachers of that.

There are plenty of places to lay the blame in the sport of hockey, and just by watching the game, you can have a finger-pointing frenzy. Let's start with teammates, more specifically goalies, the last line of defense. Almost every mistake they make results in a goal against, which makes them a very easy target for blame from teammates, coaches and parents. Then there is the defense, also a very noticeable place to lay blame, as mistakes by them often result in shots on goal, and occasionally goals against. It's easy to point the finger at them, too. Lastly, it's the forwards. Their mistakes are not as noticeable because it's not as easy to directly tie them to a goal against. But, on the flip side, if they don't score any goals, or enough goals, the finger can easily be pointed in their direction.

Then there are the numerous variations of finger pointing that can go on in the direction of the players. For example, the "weaker" players on the team (and there always will be a weakest player on every team) will get their share of blame as the season progresses, as will the "best" players on the team (and there will always be a best player on every team), the power play and the penalty killing. Blame is great that way. You can send it any way you want any time you want to deflect it away from yourself.

One of the very first lessons kids learn, once they really start to understand hockey is "I had my guy". Those four words can be very powerful. On the surface, it means, "When the other team was scoring the goal against us, I had my guy covered. He wasn't involved. I did my job." Looking deeper than that, it means, "I wasn't responsible. Someone else was. Blame them. Don't blame me." It's no longer a team thing, it becomes an individual thing, a selfish, finger-pointing thing.

And we adults are very good at reinforcing that attitude in them. The recent very-unfortunate death, and subsequent trial in Massachusetts served as a very high-profile example of that. Who was to blame? Junta, for standing up for his kids? Or for taking it a little too far, a little more than self-defense

required? Or Costin, for not having better control over the on-ice activity? Or for reacting aggressively when confronted about it?

Blame can go any way you want it to go. In hockey, in addition to the players, there are many adults who can be blamed. The referees. Great target. Easy target. Something doesn't go the way you think it was supposed to, look no further than the referees.

Excellent target for players, parents and coaches. The referee made a bad call, or what we thought was a bad call, or doesn't know the rules, or how to apply them, or wasn't in the right position to make the call, or is homer, or has an ego, or has a personal vendetta against the coach, or the team.

But if that's not enough, and more blame needs to be laid, then the coach is the next easiest target. My kid didn't make the team, but should have. My kid didn't get to play enough, or didn't get to play with the right players, or didn't get to play the right position, or in the right situation. The coach didn't know what to teach them or how to teach it, or didn't know how to run a practice, or how to motivate them, or how to run the bench.

And if that's not enough blame, we can always blame the parents. They are too involved, they tell their kid not to listen to the coach, but to do what they say. They put too much pressure on their kid, they expect too much out of him or her. Or they are not involved enough, they let the kid miss practice, they get to practice late, they don't have the kid ready to play when he does get there.

And if more blame still needs to be laid at that point, we can always blame the organizers. Association officials, tournament organizers, league officials, MAHA and USA Hockey all can be blamed. Obviously, they favored some team, for some reason they wanted them to win, they didn't make the rules the right way, they didn't enforce the rules the right way, they have personal vendetta against me, or my kid. They are the reason why things are going the way they are supposed to.

Blame is great that way. It can be thrown any way you want to. Any time you need to.

Being responsible, being accountable, looking in the mirror first. That's a different thing. And much harder to do. But it is one of the most important lessons that kids can learn, and should learn, especially from a team sport like hockey.

And whom should they be learning it from? Who has the responsibility to teach it to them? The adults of course. The coaches, the referees, the administrators and officials and the parents. Kids learn from all of us.

So, as adults, it is time that we accept that responsibility, and start teaching our kids the right lessons. Without pointing the finger.