

GET BETTER

Not just talent

BY JEFF SEROWIK

A lot more than just talent goes into the recipe for building a successful athlete. Discipline and a sense of responsibility are vital in anything you do in life. Kids need responsibilities outside of hockey that will help them throughout their lives.

There was not a day growing up that I didn't have at least a half-hour of chores - stacking a cord of wood, cooking dinner, washing the dishes, cleaning my room or sweeping out the garage. My parents both worked. If I wanted to play the game I loved, I had to carry my share of the family load. I also worked full time in the summer from age fourteen. My dad always taught me to look in the mirror at the end of the day knowing I did everything I could do to improve both as a person and as an athlete.

Hockey is a constant learning process. Emphasize education with your kids, so if they are someday drafted into the NHL, they'll have a solid education to deal with that high-pressure life. And they'll also need a solid education to have a worthwhile life after the NHL.

Kids also need to be "students of the game." I used to study Bruins games and focus on my favorite player Ray Bourque. I'd analyze his every shift and try to emulate his moves, his demeanor, and his calmness in my own game. I learned a lot just by watching him. Brains win games!

My folks said if I wanted to start something, whether it was sports or Cub Scouts, I was to give it everything I had. They always taught me to be my own person and an independent thinker. And they insisted that once I started something I had to finish it! If I wasn't happy on a particular team or in my class at school, they wouldn't pull me out and take me to another program. I had to figure out a way to get through that situation, whether it was communicating with the coach or the teacher, or to work my way through it with extra help or extra work off the ice. They were really preparing me for adult life.

If hockey was an easy game, everybody would play it and no one would bother to watch. But it's a tough game about overcoming adversity. You make your own breaks, so when something goes wrong, take the blame and find a way to fix it.

Even in the pros there are players who are quick to blame their linemates, their



PHOTO BY DAVE REGINEKORWY

Even great players like the Detroit Red Wings' Henrik Zetterberg make mistakes - but they never lose confidence in their ability.

coach or whoever is handy for their own failures. They should look in a mirror. Players need to learn to "own it." This means accepting a mistake, learning from it and becoming a better person because of it.

I always marveled at how well Bourque bounced back from his mistakes. Yes, even one of the greatest defensemen ever made his share of mistakes. It's how he reacted to the mistakes, how he recovered and didn't let it happen again that made him such a great player. He never lost confidence in his ability. He always wanted the puck after he made a mistake. He wanted to make up for it, and he always did.

Learn to enjoy this wonderful game on and off the ice. In my hockey career I have met so many great fans, teammates, coaches, parents and campers. It's really all of these people who give me my greatest memories at the end of the day.

So get to know your teammates and their folks. Show genuine interest in them. Thank your coaches, your teachers, and above all your parents. Let them know that you understand and appreciate the tremendous financial sacrifice and the huge investment of their lives they are making to let you enjoy this great game.

Jeff Serowik owns Pro Ambitions Hockey.



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