

10 Reasons Why I Would Never Coach Minor Hockey

By Jamie McKinven · December 20, 2013

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Since the end of my playing days, I've had many requests to coach minor hockey in my hometown. It's always, "Come on Jamie. This is a great opportunity for you to give back to the community. The kids could learn a lot from you." I always politely decline and thank them for keeping me in mind. Don't get me wrong. I love hockey and I love kids. In fact I love teaching and mentoring young hockey players (I teach power skating and skill development on a session to session basis). The one thing I can't stand, however, is the politics involved in minor hockey and the look that some parents get in their eye once they walk through the doors of an arena. You can take the most generous, caring mother or father, who would give anyone the shirt off of their back, but once the puck drops in little Johnny's game, that same parent can turn into the Tasmanian Devil on steroids.

Here are the top ten reasons why I would never coach a minor hockey team, in no particular order.

No. 10: My kid is the best

Every parent thinks that their kid is better than everyone else, whether they admit it or not. They may not outwardly say it, but deep down, consciously or subconsciously, they believe it. That means if their kid isn't getting the minutes they feel he or she deserves, they will unleash hell to make sure that they do. Over the years, I've seen parents make up lies about coaches to get them fired so that they can bring a coach in who will play their kid more. We're talking about ruining someone's reputation.

Hell hath no fury like a parent scorned.

No. 9: I know more than the coach

In minor hockey, everyone knows more than the coach. Steve, the tax adjuster who never played hockey, but has read Ken Dryden's book "The Game", is bragging to Harvey, the millwright who played four years of house league, about how the team would be undefeated if he was coach. Steve and Harvey are working themselves up into a frenzy during the game and can't wait to let the coach have a piece of their mind come the final buzzer.

No. 8: Everyone is a statistician

My friend and I always go back and forth about the next million dollar idea. One week I told him that I'd really found it this time. My idea was to create a smartphone app that times the length of a shift in hockey. A parent can use the app to record shift times throughout a game. Each game will be stored in the app and a running average total will be accessible, showing how much ice your kid is getting. The app would also include an option to time other kids' shifts and run a comparison. I jokingly told a group of minor hockey parents about the idea and they thought it was brilliant. Parents are always looking for the proof to show that their kid is getting screwed. Everybody's a statistician when they're looking for excuses.

No. 7: That kid shouldn't be getting as much ice as my kid

Where you have parents who think their kid should play more, you will also find parents who think someone else's kid shouldn't play as much as their kid. It never ends. If you have Parent A, Parent B and Parent C, you will never have complete harmony between all three. If Parent A and Parent B's kids play on the power play and Parent C's kid doesn't, Parent C is mad. If Parent A, Parent B and Parent C's kids all play on the power play, Parent A is mad because they don't think Parent B and Parent C's kids should be on the power play.

No. 6: My kid didn't get drafted so it's the coach's fault

If you couldn't pay me \$100,000 to coach minor hockey, you couldn't pay me \$1 million dollars to coach minor hockey at the minor midget AAA level. The minor midget AAA level is the age group in which kids are measured, assessed and scrutinized for major junior league drafts. Scouts line the stands and fill out their reports on who has what it takes to make the jump to the next level. The pressure is higher on kids at this level and even higher on coaches. Since every shift is under the microscope, parents are more restless and irritable than usual. If little Johnny scored two goals and his team won, it wasn't good enough. Why? He should have scored three. Whose fault is it that he didn't get the hat trick? The coach, of course. You see, little Johnny played 36 seconds less than his season average (Calculated on my new I-Phone App "Shift Tracker"), which would have made the difference. Stupid coach. My husband Steve, the tax adjuster, should be coaching this team. Did you know he read Ken Dryden's book? Cover to cover.

No. 5: The Rumor Mill

Minor hockey rinks are like the water cooler at the office. It doesn't take much to circulate a rumor. Here is how it works. Little Johnny didn't get picked to shoot in the shootout on Saturday. Johnny's mom, Susan, is pissed. Susan tells little Ricky's mom, Denise, that she heard that the coach was swearing and yelling at the kids after practice the other day. Denise is appalled and tells Derek's mom, Janet. Janet, the team busy body, runs to the minor hockey board and files a complaint. All of a sudden there is an investigation with three sets of parents saying they heard this alleged event through the vents in the hallway. The coach gets reprimanded and Susan smiles smugly.

No. 4: I'll do anything for my kid. (Wink, wink)

Most parents will go above and beyond for their kid. For most, this means working an extra job to put a kid through hockey or working bingos, 50-50 draws or other fundraising events. Some parents, however, will go as far as to prostitute themselves. Ask any minor hockey parent if they have ever heard of a parent sleeping with the coach to get their kid more ice. It happens. Obviously not on every team, but it happens. Even if it doesn't happen, the mere possibility of it happening adds more ammunition to the rumor millers.

No. 3: Everyone is an expert

The one thing I hated as a player was when we would mingle with certain fans after a game and they wanted to give you advice. They would say things like, "You passed on that powerplay in the second period and we didn't score. You should have shot and we might not have lost by one goal." Next game the same fan would say, "You shot on that powerplay in the second period and we didn't score. You should have passed and we might not have lost by one goal." No matter what happens, someone who never played the game has a better idea of how it should be done. In minor hockey it can be the worst. Since parents shell out copious amounts of money, they feel entitled to shove their opinions down your throat.

No. 2: The politics of picking a team

New rules in most parts of Canada now state that a team is evaluated and picked by "objective" consultants due to the issues associated with coaches picking their kids and their kids' friends. The only problem with this is, who are these objective consultants and where do their allegiances lie? It's no secret that money sometimes changes hands when it comes to selecting teams. It happens all the way up to the professional ranks, in one form or another, so why wouldn't it happen in minor hockey. I have known former minor hockey coaches who said they accepted "gifts" ranging from large sums of cash to job offers to ensure that a kid makes a team. The only change with the new rules is which pocket that cash finds its way into.

No. 1: The misplaced obsession with winning

Minor hockey rinks are filled with so much anxiety. People get worked up when their kids play hockey. They scream and stomp their feet throughout games and even practices. It's a misplaced obsession with winning that hides the real purpose for organized youth sports. The purpose of any organized sport under the age of 16, whether it is AAA or house league, should be development and fun. Sports are fun! At least they are supposed to be. 99.9% of the kids who start playing hockey will never make a dime playing the sport, let alone recoup the tens of thousands of dollars their parents shelled out for all the direct and indirect costs of minor hockey. If you're going to spend all that time and money on a sport, shouldn't it be fun and full of great memories? Most minor hockey parents get this and are in it for the right reasons but all it takes in one or two bad apples to ruin a bushel.

Jamie McKinven Bio

Author of "So You Want Your Kid to Play Pro Hockey?". Jamie grew up idolizing the high-octane players of the free-wheeling eighties only to break into hockey's higher levels during the tight-checking late nineties and 2000s. McKinven scratched and clawed, sacrificed and laid it all on the line only to fall short of playing in the NHL and experiencing his ultimate dream. However, along the way while riding the buses and living paycheque to paycheque, he discovered a great deal about life, love and the value of following through on a dream. Jamie McKinven was a star as well as a healthy scratch, won a championship and finished dead last, scored an overtime winner and cost his team a game, and experienced a lifetime of memories that spanned two continents, seven countries and eight leagues. This is the first book written by the 30-year-old McKinven who has returned to Kingston where he coaches his former Jr. "A" team, the Kingston Voyageurs of the OJHL and lives with his fiancé Jasmine and daughter Cleo.