

Winning Isn't Everything, Is It? (Con't)

The noise in the room suddenly died down like the boom of a departing jet. The Old Puckers were not only the oldest team in the tournament, they also played the smartest and meanest game of any old timer's team near and far, and they hadn't lost a tournament in more than three years.

Ben Camper's squeaky voice, hardly louder than the silence in the room due to the doubt he felt about beating the Old Puckers made all eyes turn to him. "We can take them, boys. All we have to do is send them a present, a great big chocolate bar made with plenty of Ex-Lax in it, with a note telling them they won it as a door prize." He tried to laugh, but didn't pull it off for long, and nobody followed his lead.

Soupy had shed all except his hearing aids, and was ready to head to the showers. "We're in this for the fun of it, boys. Don't forget that. So let's stay loose, and tonight when we play that team, from you know where, we'll do just fine, if we play a smart game. We might even get a goal or two."

"By smart, you mean defensemen should worry about defense more than looking good making end to end rushes?" Rob Corkingdale, one of the team's defensemen who often got caught out of position up ice asked.

Soupy pulled the hearing aid from his left ear. With his wrinkled belly wiggling he shouted, "By smart I mean keep the game simple and have fun, Rob. Try to keep the puck out of your end and let the forwards worry about the rest. And remember guys, we're old timers. Winning isn't everything. We go out to have fun. Right?"

The words of agreement from the rest of the team sounded forced and hollow. Walter Metz, the oldest of the Pioneers at sixty-nine, tried to underline the fact that he now played the game of hockey only for the enjoyment of it by interjecting, "I'm just glad I can still lace them up, boys. It beats sitting in a rocking chair."

Mention of the Old Puckers had dimmed the jubilant atmosphere that had reigned in the dressing room a few minutes earlier. It had quickly replaced it with plans of how to approach the next game the Pioneers would play five hours later at eleven that night.

A confident team skated on the ice five minutes before eleven, while the Pioneers had been warming up for several minutes already. They had performed their pregame drills with energy until they watched the Old Puckers skate out and lazily go through a few warm-ups.

But with the first whistle of the referee they suddenly began to perk up. As they had done in the previous three years, the Old Puckers played a smart and mean game the rest of the way. They weren't fast, but their positional play was faultless and their passes were accurate and purposeful. Their power play was a slick machine that resulted in four of their six goals. When the final whistle had blown, they had won two of the three periods and the game in spite of the Pioneers' valiant efforts.

Back in the dressing room the Pioneers tried to make light of the outcome of the game. "Warren, your two goals were pictures of beauty," Brady Bower proclaimed handing Warren a fizzing Gingerale.

"Yea, and Jerry and Ben's goals didn't look bad either," Soupy added. "And didn't we have fun out there, boys?" he called out looking around the dressing room, and with a wave of his hand inviting the team to give him a whole hearted endorsement like a conductor prodding his drummer into the next drumroll.

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“Believe me, I’m glad we’re all sitting here with no major bruises on anyone. Those Puckers know how to use their elbows,” Tommy Lancing replied to Soupy.

Ben Camper, having taken his skates off, crawled onto the bench raised his right arm into the air causing him almost to fall off and shouted, “We’ll get them next year!” Seventeen sets of eyes stared at him in cold disapproval.

“Next year doesn’t count, boys,” Walter Metz the Ancient, as the team had baptized him after a couple of the guys had learned how old he really was. “I think it would have been a lot of fun to win this game tonight. Matter of fact, I like winning any night.” Taking his hockey shirt off and throwing it unceremoniously into his hockey bag, he looked around the room where he saw a team completely united in its feeling about winning and losing.