

A plea to hockey parents: don't be your kid's worst enemy



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The St Mikes Junior Buzzers peewee team (Colin McConnell/Toronto Star)

With the hockey season well underway, it's the right time for a plea to hockey parents at all levels: Whatever else you do for your kid during their time on the ice, do them a bigger service and ensure you're not one of the overbearing, interfering, egomaniacal embarrassments of hockey parents roaming arenas throughout North America.

An extreme example of this drain-on-the-sport parental type made news in Vancouver this week when a B.C. Supreme Court chief justice [granted a restraining order](#) against a woman who had been harassing, among others, Detroit Red Wings and Western Hockey League employees in regard to her sons' hockey careers.

The restraining order, filed by the woman's former husband and father of the two boys, bars her from any contact with the NHL, WHL, and Kootenay Ice Hockey League. It also forbids her from communicating with her children's principals, teachers, coaches and trainers. The ruling comes after she sent hundreds of emails to various people involved with her boys' teams, disrupted games and assaulted a coach.

It's apparent the woman has issues beyond her relentless pursuit of the NHL dream, but the symptoms she's showed – the selfishness; the obsession; the vicarious living through her children – are not unfamiliar to the hockey world. To an increasing degree, we're hearing about parents who think it's reasonable or noble [to trade punches](#) in the stands [with parents of the opposing team](#), or parents who teach their kids about fairness and respect [by showering amateur officials with verbal abuse](#).

To be sure, there are parents like this in every sport and other pursuits (children's pageants, for instance), but that shouldn't make hockey tolerant of it. Because bad hockey parents don't just destroy opportunities for their own kids the way the aforementioned B.C. woman did for her sons. They also poison the waters for children and parents participating in the game with basic levels of humility, humanity and dignity, and who understand that fun, and not individual fulfillment, is what hockey ought to be played for.

The problem is these overzealous parents see visions of NHL sugarplums dancing in their heads, and once they do, all standards of civility are out the window. They convince themselves they can politic their children into a big-league contract and dream lifestyle – as if that would ever take priority over talent, hard work and un-teachable intangibles in the minds of scouts and league executives – and attempt to coax, bribe or intimidate anyone who might object.

One former [Greater Toronto Hockey League](#) coach of an elite minor midget team told THN his predecessor had been given money and services – including a free roofing of the coach's house – to place players on a team when their skill level didn't justify them being there.

It never does any good, of course. Especially at the highest levels of the amateur game, players who don't belong [stick out like sore thumbs](#) and never miraculously beat the odds to star as a professional. The only thing that happens is heartbreak and humiliation for the child, and aggravation for everyone else.

It's one thing to speak up if you genuinely believe your boy or girl is being picked on or the coach is acting inappropriately. It's another altogether to bring a stopwatch to the stands and time, to the second, how often your kid is on the ice for a game, or to berate a coach or official volunteering their time and energy so your kid can enjoy themselves.

So as this season unfolds, hockey parents, be sure to keep asking yourself what category you fall under: the type of hockey parent who's there to enrich the experience for their child, or the type who's there to enrich themselves via their child's experience.

If you're the latter, do everyone a favor: leave the sport alone.