

Learning from Losing - Part I



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December 2010

Since I was six years old, I've known two truths.

- 1) I'm not a good athlete
- 2) I'm usually one of if not the smartest player on the field

I remember my first basketball season. I think I scored one point the whole year. But I impressed the coach (my Dad) and parents with one play.

At the start of a quarter they would do a jump ball. That's when the ref throws the ball in the air and two people would try to tap it to their teammate. A few times both players would get their hand on the ball and the ball would fall right down. One of the players would pick it up and the ref would blow his whistle. You see you're not allowed to pick the ball up after you jump for it. One of your teammates has to.

So one night I did a jump ball and sure enough the ball landed right by my feet. Instead of picking the ball up, I tapped it to a teammate. It was totally legal. I remember is hearing how smart I was by all the parents. I didn't think it was that big a deal.

Fast forward to one of my first hockey seasons. I was struggling mightily. And this veteran player Kevin came up to me and said, "You don't have to be the best player,

you have to be the smartest!" It was a lesson I remember to this day. The reason I sucked, was because I didn't know hockey. So if I wanted to get better, I had to get smarter.

Fast forward to 2010. My coed hockey team the Happy Little Elves were having a very frustrating season in the Black Top Street Hockey League (BTSH). I'm not sure if my teammates were frustrated, but I sure was. We had scored the most goals in the league, but also had given up the most goals. We were under .500 and though most of our games were exciting, I knew we had no chance to win the championship. But I also knew we had the talent, and as captain, it was a failure on my part that I couldn't make this team better.

A bunch of us went to Ocean City Maryland to play in a hockey tournament. Truth be told, I cared more about the fun than the hockey. I thought we'd probably get slaughtered. The first game we played this team that was just flat out better than us. We never had the ball and we lost 5-1. The next game was even worse. We lost 8-1, and teammates were yelling at teammates. We were awful. I didn't even think the team that just trounced us was that good.

The worst part was in two hours our next game was going to begin. It was the elimination round and we were certainly going to be eliminated.

After the game some of us went back to our hotel rooms and others stayed to watch the next game. That's when it hit me. I was

trying to put a square peg into a round circle. Almost all the girls on my team could run all day, but none of them ever played hockey before. So I thought, let's put the girls on offense where they can run. On defense I'd put the guys where hockey skill is more important. I brought the idea up to three of the girls on the Elves, Melissa, Melanie, and Kristen. Melissa and Melanie started yelling at me, and Kristen said, "WHAT?!?!?" It was at that moment, I knew this plan was foolproof. Furthering my belief was my friend Caroline from my travel team told the girls we should give it a try.

I excitedly went into the hotel room of my two best players, Trevor and Nak. I explained the concept to them and they loved it. Nak was even pretending to draw a diagram on the ironing board. We were all pumped.

But before our game we received some terrible news. The team we were going to play was the team that beat us in Game 1. This was not going to be good. They were just so much better than us.

But I had a game plan and I was going to stick to it. Something amazing happened, that can only happen in coed sports. During the first period, they didn't outplay us. We actually outplayed them. As the first period was ending, all of us on the bench started banging our gloves on the boards and screaming. It was 0-0 but we felt like we had won. We were a team again.

The second period was not so sweet. Our goalie Shaun (more on him next month) gave up a very long goal and a goal from his side. I was pissed because I felt we were outplaying them, and I didn't want one bad period by my goalie to ruin this plan.

The third period I switched things up. I stacked my two best players (Trevor and Nak) on the same defensive line, and put me and the other "old" dude together. Well sometimes the captain has to lead by example and that's what I did when I ripped a slapshot past their goalie. We had a million chances to tie the game but just couldn't find the net. It probably was the only time after a loss, where I felt like I had won.

My toughest critic Melanie came up to me and said, "Rich, you know how hard this is for me to say to you, but that was a really good plan."

I know it was Melanie. And now I was going to prove it to the rest of BTSH. The New Elves Defensive Initiative (NEDI) was born.