

Learning from Losing - Part III



Richie G.
February 2011

After dispatching with the Tuques, the Happy Little Elves made the quarter finals for the first time in our 3-year history. We all went to the bar and were pleasantly surprised with our next matchup. We would face Fresh Kills, ranked 3rd out of 20.

I didn't know much of Fresh Kills. I knew they won the championship in 2008, lost in the semis in 2009, and then decided to get rid of some of their weaker players. So I knew they were good. But I felt we could have faced a tougher team.

But then social sports tragedy struck. Our goalie Shaun hurt his ankle partying after our victory. We didn't know what to do. Fresh Kills to their credit told the Commissioner we can get any goalie we wanted. But the evil league Commissioner, (I will refer to him as Adriano) said we cannot get a goalie that wasn't on our roster the beginning of the season that didn't play for the league already. So that meant there were only two options. Either I, or some other goalie in the league that wasn't an Elf was going to play goalie in our biggest game ever.

I had mixed feelings. I knew all the other goalies we could get would be better than me, but I also hate adding "ringers" and I

wanted us to win. Not some great goalie and us. So we took a vote and not surprisingly, it went by gender lines. All the girls wanted to get the best goalie we could, and almost all of the guys said lets win with an Elf. So they chose me.

My goalie finally ended all the ruckus by declaring himself healthy enough to play. Game day came, and Shaun came in with a cane. He said it was to intimidate the other team. If by the other team he meant me, it worked, because I thought we wuz screwed!!

But I respected his guts, and I wanted to play well for the guy. This is social sports, and dude is on a cane and playing goalie. My teammates must have felt the same, as we bombarded Fresh Kills. At the end of the first half, Shaun had made some pretty good saves, but we pretty much flat out dominated them. Only problem was, we were only up 1-0.

I knew we were in trouble. Even though we had crushed them, I could tell they were a really good team. They were passing the ball all over the place, and had some very talented players. One of their girls on the team was a great forchecker, and it was almost like they had a power play every time she was on the rink. I could only imagine what the score would have been without the new system I created (NEDI).

I was about to sorta find out. Their best player Ariel made an unworldly play on us and tied the game early in the 2nd half (we

play two halves in this league). Soon after, they made it 2-1. We were unraveling.

Now it was Fresh Kills who were dominating us. I knew we needed a break, but I didn't want to use my precious time out. I was just sorta praying that Shaun would keep us in the game till there were two minutes left or so, and then I can use my timeout to get things settled. But one of our players Eric, realized the game...the season....was about to get away from us and called the timeout. I was pretty pissed because I knew we would need it later, but I understood.

The timeout clearly helped. The domination ended. But we still didn't get anything going offensively. I was on the bench, coaching instead of playing at this point, but I could never get my best players on at the same time. There was only 1 minute and 20 seconds left in our season, when the ball went out of bounds. I *sooooooooooooo* wanted to use a timeout now, but I didn't have one. So I did the next best thing. I screamed, "WATER BREAK!!" Everyone knew what I was doing.

The other team rightfully complained, and the Evil Ref Derek said, "The goalie can get water, but everyone from both teams have to stay right here." Grrrrr. The break would help a little. I would tell my goalie to stand right next to our bench, and then have our best scorer Trevor come on for him. But its not like I could set up a play like I wanted to.

Until an early Christmas Miracle occurred. The other team called a timeout.

I ran to the ref and said I can now switch my players and he said absolutely. I put out my best six, and we set up a play.

Approximately 40 seconds later the game was tied. Ryan scored on a tap in and we went nuts. I typically don't go crazy during a game, but I was pumped. I knew this game was ours.

In overtime we had approximately 10 chances to score before Trevor finally buried one. A secret video clearly shows his follow through was high, but luckily Derek missed it and the Elves were on to the semis!!

As we went to the bar, I was so proud of my team. We had went from one win in 2008, to the semi-finals. I was proud of my goalie who freaking came to the game in a cane! But I knew for this story to become legendary, we had two more wins to go.

And unfortunately, we had to face the defending champs in the next round, the Sky Fighters. The team that had just beaten us 6-1 in the last game of the regular season. The NEDI was a good system, but I needed to tweak it and make it great. And I had 7 days to come up with a plan.