

**ONE FINGER CAN'T LIFT A PEBBLE:  
A GAMEPLAN FOR TEAM BUILDING  
IN COACHING AND TEACHING**

**GRANT FRIER**

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I dedicate this work to  
my family  
...these are your stories

## Abstract

This project is a qualitative inquiry into leadership through the eyes of a coach and school administrator. Utilizing a series of personal essays and narratives, the study examines how successful teams are developed, what the qualities are of effective school leaders and what the lessons are from sports and coaching that can be applied to school leadership. The essays draw on the writings of successful coaches and leaders in sports, education and business. The central themes that tie the essays together are team building and mindful practice. Some of the specific topics that are addressed include the importance of communication, facing adversity together, career stages, the importance of planning and preparation, and developing a game-plan or vision. Writing narratively and autobiographically, I intended to move to a mindfulness of practice through reflecting about significant events in my career and life.

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## Chapter 1: Tip-off

### Introduction

“When you boil rice, know that the water is your own life” (Dogen, as quoted in Tanahashi & Schneider, 1994, p. 54).

“Why are you doing your Master’s degree at this point in your career?” was a question that I was asked many times by family, friends, and colleagues when they heard that I was going back to school. After all I had been teaching for nearly 30 years at that point, I had been a principal in schools in Southern Alberta for nearly 20 years, and I was going to be eligible for retirement by the time I graduated in three years. It has taken four years. I must admit that I had some of those same thoughts myself. What was I getting myself into? Wouldn’t my time be better spent running my school? Where would I find the time that I needed? Would I be creating unnecessary additional stress for myself trying to juggle course work with the other demands in my life?

“I never wanted to write an autobiographical work, being averse to anything autobiographical” (Bernhard, as quoted in Roorbach, 1998, p. 7). I had never written anything autobiographical. The first autobiographical writing that I did was in my first class of my Master’s program. I found this kind of writing very difficult because while I consider myself analytical, I had never spent much time analyzing my own life. I can still recall the first time I was called upon in class to share a piece of my writing with the fellow members of my cohort. I felt like I was opening up myself to strangers and I felt uneasy about the entire process. In fact I recently looked at the notebook from that class that contained the following entry:

What I really want to say is that I'm questioning the value of this course. I'm afraid to open up and this morning I found myself hesitant to come...I need to begin the process of self-examination. It appalls me to think that I haven't been truly reflective in 30 years of teaching...I feel that I have discussed issues but I haven't looked at the existential side...I want to develop the role of the principal as coach and work with my staff. (September, 2000)

Soon, however, I found myself sharing some very personal thoughts about teaching in particular and life in general with my classmates. Under the skillful guidance of our professor, we were drawn out of our shells and developed a sense of trust that enabled us to explore areas of our practice that many of us had left unexamined. The class discussions that followed were insightful and led to a free exchange of ideas about pedagogy that I found stimulating. This was what I wanted from my Master's program. I wanted to refresh my practice and continue my professional growth. I didn't want to retire on the job and slide into retirement.

Qualitative writing is a way to nurture that growth. Richardson (1994, p. 517) states that "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it." When I started work on this project, I was drawn to doing something like a traditional paper. You do some research, synthesize the information that you have found and then spit out a paper. This would be the safe approach. But as Karen Meyer (2003) states:

I was drawn here because I can see people taking risks...I realized here are the people who are taking risks and their projects are relevant to real life goals and so



meaningful to everybody's life. How rigorous, how challenging, how difficult these projects are. (p. 14)

I am going to write narratively and autobiographically about sports and coaching as a means of helping me to explore leadership and in particular team building. More importantly I want to develop self-knowledge through the writing process. John Wideman (2001) states that writing autobiographically does not ensure this will happen. "Hoops (basketball) and writing may result in the most basic sort of self-knowledge, but none of that's guaranteed. They're about the seeking, the inquiry, process not destination" (p. 13).

The biggest difficulty in writing autobiographically is the veracity of what is written. As Roorbach says, "...if your reader doesn't believe you, you're sunk as a memoirist. And weirdly, sometimes it's easier to capture readerly belief when you're consciously making fiction" (p. 11). Wideman talks about the many games writers play as they try to recall and represent themselves at some point in the past:

The problem for writers is that story must be invented for each narrative. A story interesting to one person may bore another. Writing describes ball games the reader can never be sure anybody has ever played. The only access to them is through the writer's creation. You can't go there or know there, just accept someone's words they exist. (p. 10)

However, as I began to do more journal writing, something that I had done little of previously, and as I looked at my experiences as a coach, I began to look at my background in sports in a more introspective fashion. I began to explore some of the

issues in schools and developing teams that related to my journey in sports and coaching.

My project took a more personal tone and I looked at developing my own story.

Sports have always played an integral role in my life. Some of my earliest memories are of sports. Playing hockey on a backyard rink that my father had made. Getting a group of friends together on a hot summer day and playing baseball for hours on end. Proudly wearing my Little League uniform to school after having made my first team. They were simpler times and most of our sports were unorganized. We made the rules and chose the teams.

I think of how sports have been part of my family over the generations. One of the earliest photographs I have of my grandfather is of him in a soccer team picture with the local club in Canterbury, England. My father was always involved in sports; first as a player and then as a coach. Our family schedule revolved around my father's coaching schedule, particularly in the summer months when he was coaching baseball or fastball. My father is a member of the Lethbridge Sports Hall of Fame and the Alberta Fastball Hall of Fame. I was a decent ballplayer and played some basketball. My daughters excelled in sports. The eldest played basketball at North Idaho College before returning to Canada to complete her education degree. She has coached volleyball and basketball in junior high school. My youngest daughter played basketball at the University of Lethbridge and after teaching for four years upon her graduation returned to the University of Lethbridge as the women's basketball coach. In the meantime I have three grandsons who are actively involved in football, hockey, soccer, basketball, and competitive swimming.

I have been involved in coaching since I first started teaching 32 years ago. Over the years I have coached basketball, volleyball, and baseball school teams at the elementary, junior high and high school levels. I was also a playing coach of a local fastball team for a number of years.

The key role that sports have played in my life has shaped my career in teaching and administration. I hope that looking back at my life and career in this context will lead me to a deeper understanding of myself and set the stage for further personal and professional growth.

#### Game-Plan

“You develop a team to achieve what one person cannot accomplish alone. All of us alone are weaker, by far, than if all of us are together,” (Kryzewski & Phillips, 2000, p. 67).

Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski states, “ People want to be on a team. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves” (p. 185). Los Angeles Lakers coach Phil Jackson says that “...the most effective way to forge a winning team is to call on the players’ need to connect with something larger than themselves” (Jackson, 1995, p. 5). This spring the Calgary Flames made an inspired run at the Stanley Cup that saw them reach the finals where they lost in the seventh game. The city of Calgary became awash in a sea of red as did much of Southern Alberta. Ordinary citizens banded together to show support for their team. Look at the continuing popularity of team uniforms as a fashion statement. Rappers and hip-hop artists have made clothing copied from uniform styles of the seventies and eighties the latest fashion statement. Look at the popularity of

Team Canada jerseys with people of all age groups in Canada since the 2002 Olympic Games that saw both the men's and women's teams win gold. Why do members of each year's Grade 12 graduating classes want to purchase sweatshirts with their grad insignia emblazoned on the front or back? Those uniforms signify that they identify with a team, whether it is their own high school, a pro team, or their country. People have a need to belong.

Teachers are no different. They want to be in a situation where they feel that they are doing something for the greater good. They want to feel that they belong to an institution that is bigger than any one of them. How many teachers enter the profession for financial rewards? Most teachers would tell you that they wanted to make a difference. They wanted to help young people reach their potential. They wanted to be part of an honoured profession. Noel Tichy (2002) writes that

...the kind of ownership that really generates energy is not economic. It is emotional. It is the kind that gives people a sense of responsibility. It is the kind that makes them feel their actions make a difference. It is a sense that they are a valuable member of the team." (p. 89)

After more than 30 years in teaching and administration, I have rarely seen a time that has been more demanding on teachers than the current education climate. Fullan (2001) calls it a "...culture of change" (p. 1). He states: "Change is a double-edged sword. Its relentless pace these days runs us off our feet. Yet when things are unsettled, we can find new ways to move ahead and to create breakthroughs not possible in stagnant societies" (p. 1). In addition, schools in Alberta have been buffeted in the wake of the recent teacher's strike and arbitrated settlement that has imposed a series of staff and

program cuts. My own school has felt the added impact of declining enrollment. The school reopened its doors this September after a major renovation project and was reconfigured from a high school to a junior/senior high school with Grades 7-12. This is the third different grade configuration in three years. We are in the midst of putting together a new team at the school. If we are going to make it through these demanding times it is essential that we work together. Team building is something that I have been part of as a coach and school principal for my entire career. I would like to explore team building from the perspective of a coach, draw upon my experiences in sports and use them as the framework for my writing about leadership.

In some ways it is simplistic to rely solely on a coaching model of leadership. Goleman (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2003) has identified six leadership styles of which one is a coaching style. Elaborating on his previous work on emotional intelligence (EI), he states that “coaching exemplifies the EI competence of developing others” (p. 62). That is certainly one of the hats that you wear as a coach. Much of the time you spend practicing revolves around developing the skills of your players. You develop the fundamental skills in your players so that they can contribute to the success of the team.

But there are other times when a coach has to adopt a more direct approach. Goleman calls this the command approach and says that it should not be used often but that it can be effective when dealing with an emergency situation. Tichy (2002) feels that “the single most important and difficult-to-master issue for a leader/teacher is how to effectively exercise power to the betterment of the organization and of the individuals in the organization” (p. 141). In games a coach may take a last minute timeout to outline a play that is to be run or a defence that is to be employed. This is not a time to ask players

to do something, it is a time to tell them. But it can have its drawbacks. What if your opponent has anticipated what you are going to try? Do your players stop thinking and just do what they were told regardless of the outcome? How does that apply to teaching when a principal is managing a group of professionals? McKenna and Maister (2002) state, “Most often, you will be working with highly talented people who do know what to do and how to do it, but just aren’t doing it” (p. 5). Rudy Giuliani (2002) writes that a leader “...cannot simply impose his will, and even if he could it’s not the best way to lead. He must bring people aboard, excite them about his vision, and earn their support” (p. 184).

Tichy (2002) believes that a coach must have a “teachable point of view,” (p. 73) that makes his or her knowledge available to others. This “Teachable Point of View is a cohesive set of ideas and concepts that a person is able to articulate to others” (p. 74). A coach has to figure out how to convey his or her knowledge of the game to his players including the values about the behaviours that are expected of the team. Tichy feels that:

The essence of leading is not commanding, but teaching. It is opening people’s eyes and minds. It is teaching them new ways to see the world and pointing them to new goals. It is giving them the motivation and discipline to achieve these goals. And it is teaching them to share their own knowledge and teach others.

(p. 74)

Tichy writes for a business audience. Education leaders need to look in the same direction as they develop their school teams. The term principal refers to the notion that the head of the school is the principal teacher. The English use the term headmaster to

refer to the position. Principals need to adopt the view that they have to be teaching their staff how to operate as a team.

Goleman also describes three other styles: “visionary, ...affiliative, and democratic that create the kind of resonance that boost performance” (Goleman et al., p. 53). All of these styles are conducive to team building. The visionary style leader helps “...move people to shared dreams” (p. 55). The affiliative leader “...creates harmony by connecting people to each other” (p. 55). The democratic leader “...values people’s input and gets commitment through participation” (p. 55). Good coaches use elements of all of these styles as do effective principals. Goleman goes on to say that

resonant leaders know when to be collaborative and when to be visionary, when to listen and when to command. Such leaders have a knack for attuning their own sense of what matters and articulating a mission that resonates with the values of those they lead. (p. 248)

Over my career in coaching I have seen a trend away from the command style of coaching and leadership to a blended style. Jennifer James (1997) writes that “...many athletic coaches have changed their tactics from control and sometimes humiliation to empowerment, self-esteem, and team-based motivation” (p. 161).

Another leadership style that Goleman cautions against is the pacesetter style. In this style the leader

...holds and exemplifies high standards for performance. He is obsessive about doing things better and faster, and asks the same of everyone. He quickly pinpoints poor performers, demands more from them, and if they don’t rise to the occasion, rescues the situation himself. (p. 72)

Phil Jackson describes a similar situation that occurred when basketball superstar Michael Jordan returned to the Chicago Bulls after having retired from the sport. Jackson writes: “Some of the players were so bedazzled by his moves they’d unconsciously step back and wait to see what he was going to do next” (p. 10). The result was that Chicago wasn’t winning.

Fullan (2001) also writes of the danger of the pacesetter style of leadership in education. He warns that these leaders

often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement...Superhuman leaders also do us another disservice: they are role models who can never be emulated by large numbers. Deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the very few who are destined to be extraordinary. (p. 1)

In other words, lasting change needs to be a team effort and not the role of a few leaders. “One finger can’t lift a pebble” (Jackson, 1995, p. 77) is a Hopi saying that Phil Jackson uses as part of a chapter title in *Sacred Hoops*. This is not a typical basketball book that focuses on the “Xs and Os” of coaching. Rather it is a tome that focuses on the art of coaching through the power of mindfulness and compassion. There is a plethora of leadership manuals available to educators that talk about team building. It is my belief that we know what to do but lack the touch to make effective changes. I hope through the process of writing and reflecting about my career to move towards a mindfulness in my own practice.

A game plan is the blueprint that coaches use to prepare their teams for games. Often it is the synthesis of information gathered about an opponent from a variety of



sources including scouting reports, game films, statistical analysis and talking to other coaches. At a high school level it will be a simple plan but at the college or university level it becomes quite detailed. Basically it is the coach's vision for what the team must do to have success against an opponent. School leadership isn't about winning or losing but it is critical for an effective school to have a common vision for the future, and it is incumbent upon the principal to play a critical role in the development of this plan.

During a game a coach has to be prepared to alter the game plan after she or he sees what is working and what is not. In this sense it is like action research. You start with a problem, make a plan, see if it works, and then revise it. Good schools with strong leaders do this all the time.

So why is it that when many people think of the importance of teamwork they ...think of it in terms of how much energy it saves when people aren't working at odds or playing politics with their colleagues....A good leader who can make people feel that they really are contributing members of a team that is working towards a shared and worthwhile goal can unleash huge stores of positive energy. (Tichy, 2002, p. 88)

In the following chapters I highlight the critical issues in leadership that I have experienced, through personal essays and narratives about significant events and people during my journey from childhood to becoming a leader in sports and education. Once I had written most of the essays it came time to try and sort them and organize them. My first draft was organized quite differently from my second draft. Three main areas emerged from this restructuring. The first section is a loosely connected series of vignettes about my life and career that revolved around sports. The second is a tighter

collection of essays built around team building. The third section revolves around my family, with essays on my father, my daughters, and three of my grandsons. I hope that readers will find that the sum is more than the whole of its parts—that taken together these essays and narratives tell a coherent story.

## Chapter 2: The Roots of Leadership

### The Rotary Tournament

Head down, knees bent, the dribbler sizes up his defender. You know that he is going to try and take him off the dribble. The crowd is buzzing in anticipation. This semi-final game of the NBA Hoop-It-Up 3 on 3 tournament has been bitterly contested. There has been far more than the usual amount of trash talk and attitude. The crowd has picked sides and has been vocal in voicing their displeasure with the calls of the referee and the antics of the opposing team. The heat waves shimmer up from the paved asphalt of the Currie Barracks parade square that is dotted with 50 hoops. Most of the games have been completed and this is the feature game. The dribbler gives the defender a shake move and then slashes towards the basket. His impossibly thin black legs lift him up and around the defender. He tomahawks the ball down through the basket. The crowd roars. Family and friends are laughing in disbelief and hugging and patting each other. Even the opposing team is left with wonder at the sheer athleticism of this young athlete. For his part, he acts nonchalantly as if to say, “I expect to make that move.”

With the cheering still echoing in my ears, I am transported back 45 years to the time I saw the Kansas City Monarchs and the Havana Cubans play in a baseball tournament in Lethbridge. They were all-black teams that were scraping out an existence after the collapse of the Negro Leagues following the integration of baseball in 1947. When Jackie Robinson stepped onto the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers, it marked the start of a new era in sports and race relations but the end of segregated baseball. The event that brought them to Lethbridge was the Rotary Baseball Tournament. It was held at the old Exhibition Grandstands on the fair grounds. It wasn't exactly the ideal place for

a ball tournament. A field was set up on the rodeo infield. No grass. Just dirt that would be whipped around by the hot dry winds that suck the moisture out of the ground in southern Alberta in early August. A water truck would dampen the infield between games but it was no match for the swirling breezes. However, the grandstands could seat over 5,000 people and they were usually packed for the Friday night games and the finals on Saturday.

These were the days before baseball on TV was common. There was a certain mystique about the American teams in general, never mind the ones composed entirely of black ballplayers. As the Hoop-It-Up basketball game continued my mind wandered back,

It was Friday morning. The sun was already getting hot by 9:00 a.m. My dad managed to get a day off work and he was taking my best friend Jimmy and me to the tournament. First things first. We packed a cooler-- ham sandwiches, Orange Crush and Lethbridge Pilsner Beer. My dad worked delivering beer just like his father had before him. No alcohol was sold at the park in those days but everyone brought beer with them. The cops turned a blind eye unless someone had a few too many and became rowdy. In that case he would be shown out the gate in a hurry.

As we arrived on the fair grounds and approached the grandstands, we could still see the garbage that remained from the fair and midway which had ended two weeks earlier. The next thing that hit you was the smell. Not from the garbage. It was the sickly sweet smell of a slaughterhouse that lay to the east of the ballpark. Every now and then when there was a slight breeze flowing from the east, your lungs would be filled with the smell of death wafting over the ballpark.

As we neared the grandstands we heard the scratchy sounds of a John Phillips Sousa record being played on the underpowered public address system. My heart skipped a beat as we rushed to enter the park. Bunting, much of it faded from years of use, hung haphazardly over the rails and the front of the stands. Jimmy and I were wearing our Little League uniforms because we could get in free if we wore them. And if we were lucky, we would be selected from the dozens of boys in uniform to chase balls. The payment? A bottle of pop and a hot dog.

The stands were still nearly empty. This was the early morning game and most people were still at work. By people, I mean men. There were very few women in attendance. It was a male ritual and I was thrilled to be taking it in. Jimmy and I reported under the stands to the field director to see if we would be chosen for one of the coveted ball chaser jobs. We were in luck. We were assigned to a station located down the left field line. We had a little wooden hut to sit in. We were over 300 feet from home plate but that didn't matter. We had an unobstructed view of the action. It was a game featuring two local teams. The Vauxhall Jets and the vaunted Granum White Sox. Wealthy rancher George Wesley had put together a team comprised of good local players combined with a few college players from the United States. Year after year, the White Sox were the best amateur team in Southern Alberta. We had watched these teams play before at Henderson Stadium but this was special. In our view, every game was a special game in the Rotary Tournament.

I don't remember much about the game other than how stifling hot that little hut became even though it was early in the morning. We didn't have many balls to chase. Soon we started to get damp with perspiration as the morning sun's rays beat directly into

our little south-facing hut. The flies were oppressive. Repeated attempts to swat them away with our hands or baseball hats only brought momentary relief before they swarmed back again. We started to look with envy at the batboy for the White Sox sitting in the relative cool of the dugout. His name was Greg and when we chased down a ball, we returned it to him. He would take it from us with a disdainful look on his face. He then would hand the balls to the umpire. In the pecking order of batboys and ballboys, he was at the top and he knew it. He wore a tailored Granum White Sox uniform while Jimmy and I were wearing the graying baggy flannels of our Little League uniforms. If a bat was broken he would decide who would get the pieces to nail together and use again. This gave him a lot of leverage because we didn't have the money to buy new bats for the games of pick-up ball that we played nearly every day when school was out for the summer.

After the game was over, we headed back under the grandstands for our payment consisting of a hot dog and a bottle of Orange Crush. We were happy and looked forward to seeing the fabled Kansas City Monarchs in our next game. Lethbridge was not a racially diverse city back in the 1950s. There were some native people but hardly any of them lived in town. There were some Japanese Canadians as well. In fact they had a ball team called the Lethbridge Nisei but a black ball team was another thing. It was only much later that I learned that this Monarch team was made up of players who were either too old or not good enough to play in organized baseball. The Monarchs and the Cubans went on for a few years as barnstorming clubs. The players on these teams were kept "...busy surviving, trying to play enough games to earn a living wage, wondering not which team they would be playing next month or next year, but if that team would even

show up to play” (Brashler, 1978, p. xviii). They kept playing because “...few of them had any money or apart from baseball, any skills or education” (p. xviii). That didn’t matter to Jimmy and me. They were Negro ballplayers from the United States just like Willie Mays and Hank Aaron.

Through the eyes of a 10-year old they looked good as they arrived at the park for their warm-ups. Jimmy and I could hardly wait to get our next assignment. Maybe we would get to sit right beside the dugouts. One by one the ballboys were assigned. Finally, it was our turn. We were directed to go behind the grandstands. We couldn't see a thing. When a foul ball came over the stands, fans in the top row would tell us where to go because we couldn't see when a ball came over. We would take the ball to the admission gate and return to our post. We were crushed. We couldn't see any of the game. I don't remember the score but the Monarchs won a close game on their way to winning the tournament.

Those memories dissipate when the crowd erupts in cheers again after this young basketball prodigy drains a 20-foot jump-shot to close out the game. I turn and head for the concession stand to get an Orange Crush.

### Dreams of Youth

“Dreams are wiser than men.” Omaha saying (as quoted in Jackson, 1995, p. 95)

So what happened? I was going to play centrefield for the New York Yankees just like my idol Mickey Mantle. I loved the Yankees as much as my Dad disliked them. He was a Brooklyn Dodger fan. I never actually watched the Yankees play that often because these were the early days of television but I could visualize Mickey Mantle’ blazing

speed, his rifle arm, the towering home runs he hit from both sides of the plate (he was a switch-hitter) and the flair he brought to the games. I would sit glued to the radio listening to the Game of the Day on the Mutual Network from the States. I think I remember those Yankees better than I do the teams of today. There was the one and only Yogi Berra, he of the “It ain’t over till it’s over” fame, as the catcher. He also played the outfield at times when he was replaced by Elston Howard who was the first African-American to play for the Yankees. Big Moose Skowron played first base and he could hit the ball a ton. Smooth fielding Bobby Richardson was the second baseman, Clete Boyer at third and Tony Kubek at short completed the infield. Besides Mantle in the outfield there was Roger Maris who broke Babe Ruth’s single season home run record and Hank Bauer, an ex-marine who had fought at Iwo Jima. The pitching staff was anchored by Whitey Ford, perhaps the best clutch pitcher ever.

I loved this team. As a kid growing up in the 50s it wasn’t hard because they seemed to be always in the World Series. We were passionate about those games and I can remember playing hookey to watch the games on TV. They were my heroes-- particularly The Mick. I have a baseball card of his more than 40 years old. Only much later did I discover that he was a boozier and a womanizer. But by then I had also lost many of my illusions about other figures such as Jack Kennedy. I had also lost any illusions about my baseball skills. Oh, I became a decent ballplayer but I had shelved any dreams of playing major league baseball.

It was only after I had grown older that I came to appreciate the role that the manager of those Yankees had played in their success. Casey Stengel was a legendary manager who was known as the “Old Professor”. Yes he had an abundance of talent to



deal with but he was a master at using his players in ways that would maximize their success. He was the first manager to platooned his players in order that right-handed hitters could bat against left-handed pitchers and vice versa. More importantly he was able to mold a talented group of individualists into a cohesive team. This is not an easy task because players tend to pursue their own self-interest in what Pat Riley calls “The Disease of Me” (1993, p. 40).

Baseball still holds a fascination for me. I like nothing better than to go to a park on a hot day, sit in the sun, drink a few beers and watch a game. I love the history of the game and I am taken aback when I think about how long I have been following it. It has been a thread that has run through my life connecting me to my father who has been dead for years now. And yes, I still dream of playing for the Yankees.

### Learning to Play

“Leaders have to search for the heart on a team, because the person who has it can bring out the best in everyone else” (Kryzewski & Phillips, 2000, p. 19).

I’ve been forming teams since I was a kid growing up in Lethbridge during the fifties. In those years there weren’t many days during the long, hot summers when I didn’t get together with my friends Jimmy, Ricky, and Tommy to play baseball along with other kids from the neighbourhood. Jimmy was a year older than I. He was a natural ballplayer who could really hit the ball. We used to play ball for hours at a time in the summer. Jimmy was on the Dodgers while I played for the Cubs. In those days we only played a limited schedule of about 15 games. There were extra games for the players that were chosen to the league’s All-Star team but not a lot. I made the All-Star team in my

final year of eligibility. Jimmy was a star who played on that team for three years. To make up for the lack of games we used to play a lot of pick-up ball practically every morning in the summer. Afternoons were reserved for swimming.

Jimmy and his younger brother were late sleepers so when a group of players from the neighbourhood were ready to go, we would head over to his house to get the brothers up. After a quick breakfast, Jimmy would lead us over to St. Basil's school grounds. It wasn't grassed like school grounds are today. It did have grass but it was a natural grass that wasn't uniform or thick. It wasn't watered and by the end of the summer it burned out under the blazing summer sun. Base paths were worn into the grass forming ruts that caught the water any time it happened to rain. Most days we would round up eight to ten players. We would choose up teams. The older players would alternate as captains and go to one side to draft their teams. The rules would be altered according to who was playing and how many players we had. For example, the very young players would get to hit the ball off a bounce or even as it rolled along the ground. Because we didn't have enough players, one side of the field wouldn't have any fielders. The rule was that you couldn't hit the ball to the side of the diamond where there weren't any fielders. You were forced to pull the ball. If you hit the ball to the opposite side of the field you were out. As a result almost all of the players in our neighbourhood grew up to be dead pull hitters.

You don't see kids playing pick-up ball these days. I think there is a combination of factors at work. One is the organization of youth sports by adults. We did have Little League baseball but it didn't seem to occupy as much time. A second factor at work was that we didn't have as many choices of activities as kids have today. I'm glad that I had a

chance to learn to play by ourselves. In the cities, parents are also afraid to let their children go off to play by themselves. A player in an organized game will get to bat four or five times. I got to bat 50 times in a day and I didn't have to worry about any adult pressure. We learned to organize ourselves, set rules and settle our disputes. I wouldn't trade those days for all of the organized ball that I later played. Furthermore, as Myrtle Potter (as quoted in Tichy, 2002) writes of her youth, "Not having the luxury of a lot of money, we learned to really sacrifice for each other....So we really did learn to sacrifice and give and really work as a team" (p. 109).

#### To the Brink and Back

Basketball practice has just finished. Most of the players have changed and gone home for the weekend. I linger behind with a friend. I am always one of the last to leave. I would rather wait until the other players have left before changing. My friend and I are talking about our plans for the upcoming weekend. This is October of 1962 and we are 14 years old. Our talk isn't about what girls we will be going out with, we are too immature for that and Grade 9 boys in a high school are the bottom feeders. Not many girls are interested in Grade 9 boys. We won't be going to a party. Our parents were always home so there weren't many parties. We're not talking baseball. The World Series ended two weeks earlier when the Yankees held on to defeat the Giants when Bobby Richardson caught a screaming line drive hit by Willie McCovey. There isn't much on television, we had one channel in Lethbridge in those days. I do have a small motorcycle, it's more like a scooter, and I can fill up the tank for 25 cents and ride all weekend if the weather holds.

But we're not talking about that. We're talking about what we will do if a nuclear war erupts.

For 13 days starting Oct. 15, 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis had moved the world closer than it ever had been or ever would be again to a nuclear war. Only recently has information come to light that war was even closer than it appeared at the time. The Soviets had not only missiles but tactical nuclear weapons as well on the island before the quarantine was put in place and they were ready to use them. Robert McNamara, who was the Defense Secretary, has stated that luck played a significant role in the avoidance of nuclear war. Another factor was that President Kennedy had been reading Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* and saw how fixed war plans had caused an unintended change of consequences that led to the devastation of World War I. Tuchman (1962) wrote:

Appalled upon the brink, the chiefs of state who would be ultimately responsible for their country's fate attempted to back away but the pull of military schedules dragged them forward. (p. 72)

George Bush likes to quote Kennedy as he makes plans to wage war on Iraq saying that Kennedy wouldn't have succeeded if he hadn't been genuinely ready to start shooting. Senator Edward Kennedy remembers things differently saying that his brother, the President, searched to find a middle ground and sought to avoid a preventative attack so as not to have a Pearl Harbor in reverse. Dallek (2003) writes that

Kennedy's resistance to pressure from military chiefs for air attacks and an invasion, and his understanding that patient diplomacy and measured pressure

could persuade the Soviets to remove the missiles were essential contributions to the peaceful outcome of the crisis. (p. 573)

That is not how I remembered Kennedy's handling of this crisis. I thought that he had made a bold stand and that he had forced the Soviets to back off. In fact, the key lesson was to give your opponent some room to maneuver. Don't back him against the wall. Today as a school administrator I wonder if there is a lesson for schools in dealing with students and in particular dealing with the students who fall through the cracks? Do we back students against the wall and not give them a chance to be heard? Are we too intent on making them fit our template for success because it is easier for us? Is it too easy to wield the big stick like George Bush seems intent on? Is it a Pyrrhic victory in that we may win the battle with a student but find that they end up dropping out? Instead of picking between two choices, do we need to look harder for a third choice instead of picking an unacceptable choice?

As I remember that October 40 years ago I remember being scared that I would be dead before getting a chance to live life. The previous year in Grade 8 we had read Neville Shute's *On the Beach* describing life in post-Armageddon Australia as people waited for the clouds of nuclear fallout to move south with their inevitable results. Less than a year later we were talking about our fate. It didn't seem possible that Lethbridge would be the target for a Soviet warhead but we wondered where we could go. Could we find safety in the mountains? Could we survive long enough in our basements? Juvenile thoughts but real ones to us. In fact the Cuban Missile Crisis spawned the construction of nuclear fallout shelters across North America. Two years later, Krushchev was out, Kennedy was dead and Goldwater was trounced by Johnson in the presidential elections

in part due to voters' fears that they could not trust him with the nuclear triggers in his hands. Today students deal with safety in the schools in the post-Columbine era and we practice lock-downs. Then we heard the civil defense sirens screaming out their warning and wondered if we would ever see a time when there wasn't the threat of a nuclear winter hanging over us.

### The Fight

Larry grabs the rebound and immediately starts to head down the court. We are playing cross-court so I have to pick him up early because soon he will be in range. I try and D-up on him and get in his face because he is such a good shooter. Larry hits Grant in the high post and then flares out to the perimeter. I have sagged down to the foul line to help out. Before I know it, Grant kicks the ball back out to Larry. He sets his feet before he even catches the ball and it is up and away before I can react. The twine of the basket snaps as the ball draws nothing but net.

This game has been bitterly contested as most of our games are. If there is one thing that Grant, Larry, Don and myself share it is that we are very competitive by nature. We have all played organized sports and bring the mindset of playing to win to our games. Don and Larry are six years older than I and are special players having been together on a high school team at the Lethbridge Collegiate Institute that won a provincial championship in the late 1950s. Larry is the principal of Isabelle Sellon School (ISS) and I am his vice-principal. He is only 29 years old and I am 24. Larry is an efficient player who makes things look easy. He has a deft shooting touch and has a variety of moves that are difficult to defend. Don is a former firefighter who went back to school and is in his

first year of teaching. He is strong and has a sweet pull-up jumper. He can dominate on the boards and shares Larry's understanding of the game. Grant is 38 years old. He is a local pharmacist and a former chairman of the school board. Grant played some high school ball in Edmonton. He may not be the most skilled player but he is relentless. He never stops running and if you are guarding him you have to hustle back or he will beat you down the floor for an easy basket. He is also a tenacious defender who rarely gives up an uncontested basket. I was a late bloomer who didn't play a lot of high school ball. I did play a year of junior varsity ball but that was about it. Since I have been on the staff at ISS I have rarely missed a Tuesday night sports night. I have rediscovered my love for a game that I thought had passed me by. I have learned a tremendous amount about the game from Larry and Don and I have tried to match Grant's intensity. As a result the ability gap between Larry and Don and me has narrowed. I have developed into a tough defensive player with a decent shooting touch. Every time we play I am either guarding Larry or Don. Lately it seems that I have been guarding Larry all the time and we have begun to get on each other's nerves. Tonight's game has been more intense than usual. Like any pick-up game there are no referees and the players are expected to call their own fouls and violations. Sometimes tempers flare if someone doesn't call their fouls. Tonight there have been several no calls. No one has said anything, but emotions are running high and simmering just beneath the surface. This competitive aspect makes our games enjoyable, but tonight these emotions are going to get the best of us and there is going to be a fight.

I grab the ball after it bounces off the floor and throw it in to Don. He proceeds to walk it up the floor. Grant picks him up quickly and is all over him. Don uses his big

body to create space and then lofts a jumper whose softness belies his muscular physique. The ball catches the front rim and bounces in tying the game. The next team to score two baskets wins the game and the night's best-of-three match.

This time Larry has released as soon as Don has shot and is able to beat me down the floor on a good pass from Grant. He catches the ball and lays it in without his feet ever leaving the floor. It is his patented move and I am powerless to stop it. The ball kisses off the backboard and falls through the net.

Don receives the ball in the mid-court and drives towards the basket. Larry sloughs off of me to give Grant some defensive help. I am left wide open at the top of the circle behind the foul line. Don sees this and gives me a perfect pass that enables me to catch and shoot in one motion. Larry has tried frantically to recover but I am able to get the shot off. His hand brushes my arm just after the ball is released. It clunks off the front rim and falls in. The rumour has it that Larry has loosened the rims on the baskets in order to create soft rims that favour good shooters like him. I glare at Larry, looking for a foul call but he ignores me and takes the ball in play.

In the next possession Larry beats me badly. I am pumped up and am trying to prevent Larry from touching the ball, overplaying him in the wing. I know that if he gets the ball he is going to take it right at me. Larry fakes a cut at the basket and receives the ball from Grant. I know that he is going to shoot his patented jumper so I rush at him. He gives me a little head fake and as I leave my feet to block the shot he drives around me to the basket. Don helps out and steps in as Larry takes the five-foot jumper. The ball hits the front of the rim and falls off harmlessly. I grab the rebound. Larry's eyes are blazing because he thinks that he has been fouled. I think that he is guilty of a charge and glare



right back at him. He doesn't say a thing but I know that he is angry. I am feeling frustrated because I have been unable to stop Larry.

Down the floor I head with the ball in my possession. I hit Don with a quick pass and then crash the boards as he shoots. I tip the ball up to myself as it careens off the rim and then go right back up with a shot. Larry swipes at the ball and rakes my arm with a hard foul. He doesn't call anything and I lose my cool and push him back. Before I know it, we start throwing wild punches at each other. We flail away for several seconds before the other players step in and separate us. Don grabs me around the waist and moves me away while Grant does the same thing with Larry. While this is happening, Larry and I stare at each other without muttering a word.

Don drags me back into the equipment room and sits me down on an old wooden chair. He fishes into his jacket pocket, pulls out a cigarette and offers me one. He lights it for me and I take a deep drag taking the smoke deep into my lungs making me cough. I feel light-headed and weak in the knees as I come down off my adrenaline high. Clouds of blue smoke soon swirl around the room. Soon I am crashing, drained and exhausted. Don doesn't say much. He doesn't have to. Why did I do something so stupid, so immature?

After a few minutes Don gets up to leave the room and tells me to stay out. In a few minutes he returns with Larry. We at once start apologizing to one another. Later that night we go for a few beers. Soon everyone is laughing at how ridiculous we looked. Neither one of us is a fighter. Thirty years later we still like to tell the story of "the fight" after we have had a few cold ones.

### Playing Together

The e-mail from Don is simply titled “Old Pictures.” He and his wife Carol are moving to Vancouver Island and came across some old pictures from the Pass Herald that were taken in 1976. I open it up and see a grainy picture of Don, Larry, and myself splattered with whipped cream and pie filling. The picture was taken at the annual school carnival held at Isabelle Sellon School. One of the big fundraisers for the carnival was a raffle in which the winners got to throw a pie in the face of a teacher. As the pie drips down our faces we stare out towards the camera with our arms linked together and big grins on our faces.

Friends. As we pass through the various stages of our lives, we seem to lose touch with many of the people who were once close to us. There are some friends, however, that we never lose touch with. These are the people that you can still share the details of your life with and feel comfortable around, even if you haven’t seen them for a long time.

Our staff at Isabelle Sellon was split between younger teachers in their first years of teaching and the older teachers who had done Normal School and who had been teaching for years. New teachers were for the most part younger than starting teachers are today. Teaching was truly a lifestyle. Our group of younger teachers did a lot of things together. We played sports together, we partied together, we would get together for coffee. We weren’t in a rush to leave the building and get on with other aspects of our lives. Teaching was our life and it was a special time for me. In some ways, I like to compare it with the special bonds that developed between people who served in the war together without trying to pretend that our experience could possibly match the feelings

that veterans must have had. I have remained close with some of those people even though most of them left the Crownsnest Pass 25 years ago. We might not see each other often but when we do we swap “war stories” of the old days. We felt like we were going to make a difference and we were going to shake up an education system that had grown old and stale. Nothing was taboo. Everything was subject to change. We had a real social conscience. We weren’t radicals by any means but we may have appeared so to the generation of teachers that preceded us.

I look upon Larry as one of the significant mentors in my career. He had a joy for education that was contagious and you never knew what to expect. He was also a proactive person before I knew what proactive meant. Sometimes he acted before he thought but we were entering a system that needed to be woken up. He was never afraid to embrace change and he was passionate about whatever innovation he would advocate. Most of all he made teaching fun. I wish I could emulate him.

Don has been my mentor for close to 30 years even though we only spent two years together on staff. He was older than I, having spent time as a fire-fighter before entering education. He came on staff at ISS when I was entering my second year there. He was going through a divorce and he would often come to my house at night to discuss his day and all his trials and tribulations. We shared a common interest in sports. He had grown up in Lethbridge so we knew a lot of the same people. In fact, all of the younger teachers on our staff at the time were not from the Pass and I think it created a bond between us.

Don’s e-mail also mentions how much he is looking forward to getting together with Larry and me for a round of golf and dinner before he heads out to the coast. These

are the kind of close relationships that developed with teammates and colleagues that I cherish as my career starts to wind down.

End of the Journey:

“It is good to have an end to journey toward;  
but it is the journey that matters in the end”

(Ursula K. LeGuin, as quoted in Jackson, 1995, p. 59).

I stare out the window of the van on a cold, frostbitten night and look upon wisps of snow drifting across the frozen highway. In back of me, seven of my players are sprawled sleeping on the seats, oblivious to the world. It has been an emotional day. We have capped off an amazing run by winning the provincial basketball championship and now we are on our way home early in the morning. The hum of the van's tires and the quiet rhythmic breathing of the players have replaced the raucous sounds of cheering that filled the gym as the game wound down to its conclusion.

I feel a strange emptiness in the pit of my stomach. We had been preparing for this day for three years. I used to picture the exhilaration that our team would share if this ever happened. It had been a tough road to the championship and our players were drained. They had been excited when the buzzer sounded to end the game which we had won by a single point. They had experienced relief as well because we had been the heavy favourites coming in, and nothing less than the championship would have lived up to our expectations. The joy we had felt, however, had soon given way to exhaustion.

After the game some of the players decided that they would travel back with their parents. All of their parents were there but some of the players wanted to travel back with

their teammates. It was like they didn't want the moment to end. But now they have crashed as the adrenaline high has gone. I am alone with my thoughts. I've turned the radio off because I want to think about this moment. I've analyzed the game and realized that I had become caught up in the emotion and made some bad coaching decisions down the stretch that could have cost us the game. So I don't feel good about that last game.

But there is more. I realize that our team will never be together again. The seniors have played their final game. I have worked with them for four years bringing them up to the senior team when they were only in Grade 9. We have had a lot of success and shared many highs and a few lows. Those four years seem to have gone by in a blur just like the highway markings that flash by under my gaze.

The best part was the camaraderie. The 12 girls on the team had put aside personal goals to work towards winning a championship. We played an up-tempo game and we worked hard on our conditioning. One of the goals that we set was that another team would not outwork us. At times rock music would be blaring as we tried to keep things moving at a rapid pace at our practices. This conditioning had paid off more than one time when we were able to come back from a deficit because our opponents could not sustain the pace we had set for the game. We also worked hard at the defensive part of the game. Most of our time in practice would be spent on defense. The glory in basketball comes from scoring but the best teams beat you with defense. They had bought into this and had bonded.

This team was successful because we had a talented group of athletes who shared a common vision. The Crowsnest Pass is not a basketball community so we did not have more individual skills than our opponents. We did have athleticism that we maximized

by developing a superior level of conditioning and then using our athleticism in a relentless full court pressure defense. I had bought into this gameplan after having read an article in *Sports Illustrated* about the full-court 1-3-1 defense being used successfully at the University of Iowa under coach Tom Davis. More importantly, it was the players who believed in the system. Jackson (1995) states that "...vision is the source of leadership, the expansive dream state where everything begins and all is possible" (p. 98).

Fullan (2001) cautions against putting too much faith in visionary leadership. However, a successful team needs to have a gameplan or vision. Bennis (1989, p.6) writes of the need for a leader to have a "... guiding purpose, an overarching vision." Goleman (2003) describes visionary leadership as a resonant style of leadership that moves people towards shared dreams and is most effective when changes require a new vision (p. 55). He states that research seems to indicate that it is the most effective form of leadership because "by continually reminding people of the larger purpose of their work, the visionary leader lends a grand meaning to otherwise workaday, mundane tasks" (p. 58).

The other thing that I was able to do with this team was to get them to set aside their personal agendas and work together to try and capture a provincial championship. Bill Russell, the legendary basketball player who led the Boston Celtics to 11 NBA championships, states that it is important to

establish your culture around your team. An organization culture in its simplest form is nothing more than the environment in which decisions are made.... So the concept of team ego is a factor in getting individuals to see success not in

terms of individual performance but rather in getting more fulfillment from the group's success. (Russell, 2002, p. 38)

I am brought out of my reverie by the oncoming lights of a transport truck. As it passes the snow is whipped up, temporarily blinding me. When I can see again, I make out the ghostly outline of the Burmis Pine with its outstretched limbs that seem to welcome us back to the Crowsnest Pass. Soon our journey will be done but the memories will remain.

## Chapter 3: Team Building

### Perfection

Perfection. A kid's game, an impossible goal, and also the name of a gut-wrenching basketball drill. The Alberta Juvenile Women's team, which I am helping my daughter Shannon coach, met on Friday for their first practice since the team was chosen a few weeks ago. The challenge is now to bring the 13 girls together to prepare for the national championships. Some of these girls were fierce rivals only a few months ago as their teams battled for high school hoops supremacy. A few of them played last year so they have friends on the team. There is also the girl from Ft. McMurray who hasn't played against any of her teammates except in the tryout camp. Some of the girls come from single parent families while others have affluent parents who can afford to fly them to Arizona to play for a club team in a tournament. The last time that they were together they were competing along with 13 others of the best players from around the province to make this team. They are still competitors in that now they are battling for playing time.

Perfection is an impossible goal in any sport. A team or an individual can win every game or every competition but still have areas that could be improved or done better. This drill requires the team to execute a set number of three-man-weaves using five and then four and finally three passes leading to a lay-up. If a pass falls incomplete, if someone travels, or if someone misses the lay-up, then the score goes back to zero and the count begins anew. Once the team has successfully completed the weaves then the players have to make 45 lay-ups using their left hands with only two misses allowed (so much for perfection). If they miss three lay-ups then the entire team has to start over.



When the drill started, passes began hitting the floor regularly and the team never advanced past the five-pass stage. Shannon, my daughter, called them together and told them the problem was a lack of communication. Several of the passes had been missed because the players weren't sure how many passes they had thrown. Immediately the players began talking to each other and passed better. They even finished the five pass series a few times before someone would drop a ball or miss a shot. By this time 15 minutes had gone by and the girls were starting to get tired from the constant running. I was starting to wonder if we would ever get on to the next drill. I asked Shannon. She told me to be patient. Her university team had made the same mistakes before they did it successfully. I asked her how long it should take. She said about 15 minutes although she had seen it go on for 45 minutes one time. Finally they completed the weave but they missed three lay-ups and had to start over. This time they completed the weave after only a few tries even though they were visibly tired. They would talk to each other and encourage the other girls. The second time they shot lay-ups they had made 43 before the third one was missed. I thought that they might give up at this point. I wondered if we were going to break them. Again they completed the weave and shot lay-ups. The girls were counting out their made shots but again they didn't make it to 45 and had to start over. However, they soon were through the weave again and this time they made 45 shots and completed the drill. The gym erupted into cheers and they were high-fiving one another. The drill had taken 38 minutes to complete.

What had they learned? The most important thing was communication, which is vital in any team sport. They learned to support and cheer on their teammates, which again is vital for team success even when you are rivals for playing time. This was a drill

where an individual could not succeed on her own, and that is important for young players to realize when they are used to being the stars on their high school teams. This drill also forged a bond among them. This was like an army boot camp where the soldiers have to learn to work together. The next morning they completed the drill in 18 minutes.

What did I learn? Patience, for starters. I was thinking that we should scrub the drill because it was too hard. Shannon knew that it would take this long and she knew that the team would get it right eventually. She also used it as a conditioning drill. A message was sent to the team that they would have to get in top condition. Finally she used it to forge a bond between the players who were coming together as a team for the first time. Could I apply these messages to school? Do administrators fail to show enough patience when they introduce new programs? As leaders, do we fail to plan for a learning curve? Fullan (2001) would call it the “implementation dip.” Do we spend enough time developing communication between staff members? Do we talk to each other about the important things? And finally, do we spend enough time on team building?

#### Face-to-Face

We have entered crunch time in our schedule. A week from today we leave for the national championships in Fredericton, New Brunswick. The time has passed where we will try and play everyone. We are now at the stage where we will shorten our line-up. Our best players need more time to play together as a unit. They need to get to know each other better on the court and develop team chemistry. They also have to get their level of conditioning up so that they can play 30 minutes or more in a game if needed.

The offshoot is that a number of players are going to see their playing time reduced. It isn't going to be easy on them. They are all used to playing a lot of minutes for their high school teams. We are now going to ask them to be role players. It is going to be a big adjustment for them. Most of the players are not used to spending any significant amount of time sitting on the bench. The game obviously means a lot to them, or they wouldn't have worked so hard at it for so many years. As Dean Smith said in talking about his North Carolina team, "Everybody on our roster wanted to play. Most expected to play. It was their competitive nature" (Smith & Bell, 2004, p. 132).

As coaches, we are also aware of the financial costs that the parents of these players have had to pay. Each member of the team was responsible for raising \$850. For some parents cutting a check is no problem while for others it is a real sacrifice coming up with the dollars in order for their daughter to play.

Shannon has scheduled individual meetings with all of the players before we leave for our game tonight. The main focus will be to talk about their short-term goals for tonight's game against Saskatchewan. The other purpose will be to talk about their roles for the balance of the season through Nationals. We won't try to set up the players to be in direct competition with each other for playing time. Dean Smith says that you should not do that because

it would have made it hard for those two players to share the same goals for the team. They would have been too self-focused and concerned about doing better than their teammates in order to win playing time. Individual goals would have surpassed team goals, to the detriment of the whole. (p. 133)

This will be the second time that the coaches have met individually with the players. I have gone through entire school years in which I have not had two meetings with each of my staff members. Why? What could be more important than to have those meetings? They are essential if a leader is going to get his players to embrace their role. Jerry Bell states that, "If employees don't understand their roles, their specific areas of responsibility, it's almost impossible for the company to work well as a team" (as quoted in Smith & Bell, 2004, p. 137). Jackson says that

...the only way to win consistently is to give everybody--from the stars to the number 12 player on the bench--a vital role on the team, and inspire them to be acutely aware of what was happening, even when the spotlight was on somebody else. (Jackson, 1995, p. 4)

### Coming Together

"Getting good players is one thing. The harder part is getting them to play together" (Casey Stengal, as quoted in McKenna & Maister, 2002, p. 5).

Last night we beat the Saskatchewan Provincial Team 71-46. We thought coming in that we should do well against them because we had beaten them earlier in a tournament in Calgary without two of our best players. In addition, we had just finished a mini-camp with the team. Because of the returning players, the roles of several of the other players were going to change. Our guards, in particular, were going to have less playing time to share. It was critical to the team's success that we integrated these returning players back into the team.

Shannon's plan was to hold a five-day training camp in Lethbridge. All of the girls would stay at her house. They would be divided into teams that would take turns preparing meals. In addition to the twice daily practices, Shannon planned a scavenger hunt for the Sunday. Working with their teams, the girls had a hilarious time as they looked for items all over the West Side including one team's trip to the firehall where they enlisted the help of the fire department. On the Monday the team watched the provincial Juvenile and Midget Boys play in the National Championships which were being held in Lethbridge.

The practice time was important. Sometimes teams get so hung up on playing games that they neglect practice. Call it the Minor Hockey Syndrome. Russell (2001) states that "success is the result of consistent practice of winning skills and actions. There is nothing miraculous about the process. There is no luck involved" (p. 113). These were highly structured practices with every minute of practice time accounted for in a written plan. The days of just rolling a ball on the floor and scrimmaging are long gone. It is in practice that you work on the little things such as setting good screens, drawing charges, and diving for loose balls that can make the difference between winning and losing. Dean Smith believed "...that if we got the little things right, it would help us get the big things right" (Smith & Bell, 2004, p. 77). Bell thinks that:

Businesses don't spend nearly enough time practicing, training, or rehearsing. In business here's a game every workday. There's little time set aside to practice or plan. We scramble from one problem to the next and do our best with what we've got (p. 84).

I would suggest that we face the same problems in schools. Everyone recognizes that our most valuable resource is our staff and yet how much of our resources do we as administrators devote to staff development? Our school division has made staff development a key area of its Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) plan. At the school level we still wrestle with planning to provide teachers with collaborative and in-service time.

More important than the practice time, the time spent together helped the team to bond. This was particularly important for our point guard who hadn't spent much time with the team this summer because she was playing with our junior national team. We were a little concerned that she might feel isolated and that she would have problems fitting in with the rest of the team. Those fears were quickly dispersed. The rest of the girls were excited about having her back because they realized that she gave us a much better chance of winning. The off-court activities and the scavenger hunt in particular also helped to forge a team identity.

When we took the floor last night, you could sense the enhanced team chemistry. The players communicated better with each other on the floor and they cheered and encouraged each other when they were sitting on the bench. There is no secret about the effectiveness of team bonding activities, yet we pay them little heed in schools. Many teachers, and I have to admit that I am one of them, get cynical when asked to participate in professional development activities that involve team building. Tichy (2002) states that "... team building is rarely a consensus activity. A leader almost always has to use power and edge to get people to work together..." (p. 281). Who wants to go to the

annual school or administrative staff retreat? We know these things work. Why are we so reluctant to use them?

### Losing

The heat is oppressive as I sit in front of the open window in my dorm room at the University of New Brunswick. There is no air conditioning, although some parents have purchased fans for their daughters to use in a futile hope that some air circulating will lessen the enervating effect of the humid heat that makes the dorm rooms seem like a sauna. It is the second day of the Juvenile National Basketball Championships being held in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Yesterday our team opened the tournament with a devastating loss to Nova Scotia. After holding a 13-point lead at halftime, our scoring touch deserted us and we couldn't buy a basket in the second half. We ended up losing by five points. We face the prospect of having to beat a very strong team from British Columbia as well as having to win the rest of our games if we are going to make it to the playoff round. Our best players seemed to tighten up as we let a game get away from us. However, this is not the time for finger pointing.

Sometimes a team will play well and still lose. This was not one of those times. We hadn't played well and could never find our rhythm--even in the first half when we built a lead. We didn't come down hard on the players after the game. As Dean Smith says, "It was better to wait until I had all the information in hand. That way I could be very specific with my criticism and praise, making it a better learning experience for the players" (Smith & Bell, 2004, p. 48). Yes, we are deeply disappointed with the loss but

we can't forget that this tournament is held to give these players a chance to compete at an elite level so that they can develop their game.

The mood is buoyant in the dorm and I can hear some of the girls singing, their voices echoing along the long narrow hallways. This is a far cry from when the girls sat in stunned silence after losing a game that we knew we had to win. Today's game against Manitoba will be a test of our mettle. Last week we beat Manitoba in an exhibition game by 40 points, but today is another day and we have to be prepared for a tough battle. Our psyche is fragile right now. That is what a loss can do to a team. Smith states that "losing can bring outside distractions, create doubt among the team, maybe result in a loss of confidence, and even bring dissension to the ranks. Therefore it has to be dealt with carefully" (p. 50).

There are a lot of clichés in sport about learning from your losses. I don't know if that is the case but I do know that I tend to remember the losses of teams that I have coached more easily than many of the wins. I don't know if we learned anything yesterday. We are not going to panic and begin to change everything. We will go with the systems and the players who have brought us to this point. Krzyzewski says that a loss

...might change a leader's strategy, but it should never change his core beliefs. If you believe in your system, in the people around you, and in your own abilities, then losing will not change what you do. But if you don't believe in those things, if you don't have the courage of your convictions, then it may change everything you do. (Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2000, p. 225)

I admire Shannon's calm and positive demeanour so much. As the leader of this team everyone is watching her closely. As Goleman says, "Everyone watches the boss.



People take their emotional clues from the top” (Goleman et al., 2003, p. 8). It is important to the chemistry of this team that the players sense she is still confident and upbeat. It would be disastrous if they felt she had given up. It won't be what she says as much as her gestures and expressions that will send a message to this team. Goleman states:

How easily we catch a leader's emotional states, then, has to do with how expressively their faces, voices, and gestures convey their feelings...since people pay close attention to a leader, even subtle expressions of emotion can have great impact. Even so, the more open leaders are...the more readily others will feel that same contagious passion. (p. 11)

I believe that Shannon did all that she could to get our team ready to play that first game. We were the first team to arrive in Fredericton in order for the girls to get used to the time difference. She was able to book an extra practice time in the gym where we played our first game so that the team could acclimatize itself to the surroundings. Even though we lost she is not giving up. Bell says that “it's an absolute necessity for a leader to be able to handle losing. The bigger a person's job, the more losses he or she will have, and the more costly they will be” (Smith & Bell, 2004, p. 55). Shannon is not quitting on this team. Perhaps there is a message to be learned.

### The Last Dance

Rivulets of sweat are running down my legs. I am standing in the Lady Beaverbrook Gym on the University of New Brunswick campus waiting for another game to end. The heat and humidity are oppressive. There is no air conditioning in this

building that was built in the 1930s, and central New Brunswick has been enveloped in a heat wave for most of the week that we've been here. The players' skin glistens with sweat before they even take the floor as they stand and talk. After our opening loss we have won three games and lost one, which means that this final game against New Brunswick is for fifth place in the tournament. We had hoped to do better. British Columbia who beat us yesterday was a better team. The opening loss to Nova Scotia continues to haunt us as we would have made the medal round if we had won that game. The girls have shown some resiliency and have played better as the tournament has gone on.

Even before we play this final game the team is starting to go off in different directions. Two of the girls have been selected by Basketball Canada to take part in a national identification camp that will run at the end of the tournament. As a result they won't be traveling back with the team. Several other girls will be going with their parents for a holiday in the Maritimes and will also be staying behind. This will be the final time that these girls who come from all over the province will be together. This was not the game that we wanted to be playing when we were preparing for this tournament but it is important for us to win it. It would leave us with a winning record of four wins and two losses and it would be affirming to win our final game.

During the course of the tournament we haven't made major changes to our playing rotation or playing schemes. However, some players have increased their playing time through their good play. This time had to come from the playing time of other players and so not everyone is happy with how things worked out. Most of the parents have been very supportive but there has been one set of parents who aren't happy with

their daughter's playing time. They haven't said anything but they have distanced themselves from the team and the rest of the parents. The other parents have been great even when their daughter didn't see much floor time.

We had tried to let all the players know that once we got to Nationals, we would be giving our starters more playing time. This would mean that the players coming off the bench would see reduced time. During the week the coaching staff held individual meetings with every player before every game that we played. We used those meetings to talk about the role that each player was going to be asked to perform. The competition for playing time was very close in some cases and it was understandable that a player may have felt that she deserved more time. We were aware of the sacrifices that the players and their parents had to make for them to play on this team. But as Dean Smith (Smith & Bell, 2004) says, "Putting a talented, compatible team together is never easy" (p. 134).

For this final game we decided that we would make an effort to get our non-starters more playing time. We want to win but we also want to reward some of these other players for their contributions to the team throughout the summer. Finally the preceding game has finished and we make our way to the bench area. The organizers have set up fans that blow on the bench. It helps a bit but we are all damp from the humidity. It is even hard to write in the notebook that I carry. As the players begin their warm-ups I sit on the bench beside Shannon. Normally I sit down the bench from her but I want to share this moment. Yes, we are disappointed, but I am also very thankful that I had the opportunity to coach with her at this level of competition. I think back to all the time that we used to spend in the gym working on her game. I think of all the games

when I coached her in high school. Now I am her assistant. The process has come full circle. I am filled with pride.

I am brought out of my reverie when the players return to the bench before the start of the game. It is time to get into the moment. There will be time for rehashing the season later. The girls are upbeat. At times the schedule has been very demanding but now it is at an end and they want to go out with a win. Right from the start we take control of the game and quickly jump out to a double-digit lead. They are playing selflessly. No one is worried about statistics. They are playing to win this last game.

Soon the game is over and we have won easily. The thought of what might have been crosses my mind. What if we had played this way in our opening game? We'll save those thoughts for later. Many of the parents have come down to the bench area to take pictures of the team. Many of these girls didn't meet until three months ago. Now they are crying and laughing as they hug each other and us. This is what makes coaching so worthwhile. The bonds that you make within a team are hard to match. Only another player knows what an accomplishment it is simply to make a provincial team. Only their parents know the sacrifices that are made. Many of these girls will go on to play basketball at the post-secondary level but they will always remember the year they played with Alberta's elite players. I will always remember the privilege I had to work with them and the coaches and parents. I have learned a lot and grown a lot.

#### Old Coaches Never Die

Two years ago I had the opportunity to hear and meet the legendary coach of Canada's Olympic Basketball Team, Jack Donohue. He was in Lethbridge as the keynote

speaker at the University of Lethbridge's Hall of Fame Induction Dinner. At that function, Donohue regaled the audience with his never-ending cache of stories about his experiences coaching basketball over a 40-year career in Canada and the United States. I am sure that parts of the presentation had been given many times before as Donohue was an in-demand after dinner speaker. However, Donohue captured his audience as he spoke in his Brooklyn accent by paying special tribute to local product Tim Tollestrup and the contributions he has made as the captain of Canada's 1976 Olympic Team that won bronze in Montreal. I have to admit that I was a little cynical about some of his stories as I had heard different versions of them from other speakers.

The following day Donohue journeyed out to Coaldale to speak at a tryout camp for the provincial juvenile team that I served as an assistant coach under the direction of my daughter Shannon. This was a different speaker from the one I had heard the night before. Gone was the slick presentation, instead the girls were treated to a heartfelt talk about what it took to be successful in basketball. He talked about the life lessons that could be learned from the sport. He was still very humorous but he spoke with a passion about the sport he had given his life to and all the people that he had had the privilege of working with. Afterwards he was very gracious as he took questions from these young players who had no knowledge of his career. Some of the girls were impressed when he talked of coaching Lew Alcindor in high school in New York. Alcindor went on to become Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the highest scoring player in the history of the National Basketball League.

When he had finished speaking it was lunchtime. The coaches were heading into Lethbridge to eat lunch and when he heard of our plans he asked if he could join us. I sat

enthralled as he talked of his early years and some of the legendary college coaches he had coached against before he moved to Canada to coach the national team. My daughter Shannon happened to be seated next to him and they started talking about coaching. This was not a one-sided conversation. Donohue took a genuine interest in Shannon's career as a coach. All too fast, the lunch break went by and soon we had to say our good-byes and head back to Coaldale for another practice.

That year Shannon received a Christmas card from him. In it he took the time to write a few words about how he had enjoyed meeting her and congratulated her on being named the Canada West Coach of the Year the previous year. Obviously he had taken the time to look up some information about her. How many famous coaches would take the time to write a few words to a young female coach who was just starting her career?

Last year Jack Donohue died after a long bout with cancer. In the stories that appeared about his death there was a common denominator. Many coaches came forth and spoke of the mentoring kind of man that he was and how he took the time to nurture them. His former players spoke of the attention he paid to their life after basketball and how he took the time to stay in touch. When I met him he was terminally ill and yet he continued to share his love of the game and his knowledge of the sport with many coaches and players. When I reflect back on this experience, I am in awe. No wonder this man had such success in team building. That kind of genuine concern about his players could not be faked. What a legacy he has left in this, his adopted country. What a lesson in team building.

Why do we not do more of this in teaching? Why do we not share our knowledge like this coach did? When a coach is preparing her team to play their next opponent, she

will frequently call the coach of a team who has recently played that team and they will talk about their tendencies. Does that team play mostly zone or mostly man-to-man defence? Do they press, and if they do, in what situations do they utilize the press? Do they run a set play offence or do they run mostly motion? What kind of transition offence do they use? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? Afterwards the coaches will exchange game tapes of upcoming opponents. In fact, the Canada West Conference mandates that game tapes must be exchanged.

Granted that preparing to teach a course is not like playing a game but this free exchange of information is hardly a normal part of the profession. Teachers who have taught in adjacent classrooms for years have never been into each other's classes. Coaches are often referred to as being part of the coaching fraternity. The meaning of this is that even though coaches might be bitter opponents on the floor they share a common bond because they understand the sacrifices that they have to make in order to be successful. They also understand the tremendous pressure that all coaches are under to win.

Are not teachers and administrators under similar kinds of pressure to produce results in today's education system, in Alberta and elsewhere? Are not schools subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as teams with the publishing of Achievement Test and Diploma Exam results in the newspaper? Is the Fraser Institute's ranking of Alberta high schools any different than the ranking systems used in college sports?

As administrators, we have to do a better job of encouraging this type of interaction by providing the time within the regular school day. Fullan (2001, p. 132) thinks that there should be an obligation of sharing knowledge among organizational

members. He goes on to state that “the key to developing leadership is to develop knowledge and share it: if it is not mutually shared, it won’t be adequately developed in the first place and will not be available to the organization in any case.” Why do we not talk about a teaching fraternity? Where are the Jack Donohues in education?

### Quitting

Slowly she walks off the floor and heads to the end of the bench. The trainer hands her a towel which she drapes over her head and then slumps into her chair. The towel partially hides her face as she bends over and stares at the floor seemingly oblivious to the game that is taking place right in front of her. Rivulets of sweat drop to the floor off her red forehead. A player to her right attempts to offer her some words of comfort but they are ignored as she sits alone with her thoughts. After another few minutes go by, she slowly lifts her head and stares into the crowd with a blank look on her face. She remains motionless as the clock clicks off the last seconds of a devastating 42-point loss. When the buzzer sounds she slowly gets out of her seat, shuffles into line and mechanically shakes the hands of the opposing team. This was a bad loss but it was not a season-ending loss for her team. However, it was the last game that she would ever play for this team. She was quitting.

What is it that prompts a player to quit a team? In this case this player would never have another opportunity to play at the university level for she has used up her last year of eligibility. To get to this elite level of competition took a lot of dedication and perseverance over the years. Out of every thousand players who play the sport at the high school level, only a handful ever get the opportunity to play at the collegiate level. For



every girl who gets to realize her dreams of playing at the highest level available in Canada there are many others who never get the chance. Why throw away your dreams? What has changed?

Relatively few players play a full five years of university basketball. For some their priorities change and they are no longer willing to make the sacrifices necessary to compete at this level. There is an adage that states that if you are not getting better you are getting worse. There is not a plateau that you reach and then are able to sustain. If you are not working on your game then you are falling behind your opponents and your teammates.

The competition for playing time on a university team is fierce, particularly if the team is competitive. There are 200 minutes of playing time to be carved up among 10 to 12 players. If the playing time was divided evenly then each player would receive approximately 20 minutes of playing time per game. That is not how it is done, however. Typically the five starters on a team will play 30 to 35 minutes a game. The first two substitutes will average between 15 and 20 minutes of playing time. That means the remaining three to five players will be sharing about 20 minutes of playing time. Every one of these players was a star player on their own high school team. They were the leaders of their teams and are not used to playing a secondary role on a team. They have not sat the bench for any substantial amount of time before they played university ball. This is difficult for many of them to deal with and it can cause friction between coaches and players. It is almost impossible for a coach to satisfy the demand for playing time for all players.

Another cause of friction between player and coach is over the roles that players are assigned. Post players want to have the offence run through them and touch the ball on every possession. Guards want the opportunity to handle the ball and make the decisions about distributing it. If their role changes it can cause hard feelings. There are many players who put their personal goals ahead of team goals. There are some players who would be happier playing a significant role with lots of playing time on a losing team as opposed to playing fewer minutes in a secondary role on a winning team. Jackson calls this a battle between the “me” and the “we”, the “...struggle every leader faces: how to get members of the team who are driven by individual glory to give themselves over wholeheartedly to the group effort. In other words how to teach them selflessness” (Jackson, 1995, p. 89). According to Jackson this is hard to teach players because “...our society places such a high premium on individual achievement, it’s easy for players to get blinded by their own self-importance and lose a sense of interconnectedness, the essence of teamwork” (p. 80).

Another complicating factor is the recruitment of new players. Every coach wants to improve his or her team. Acquiring new talent is critical. You cannot compete if you do not have talented players. Every year college coaches spend countless hours finding and recruiting new players for their program. These players may be fresh out of high school or they may be junior college transfers. The number of players recruited is usually determined by the number of vacancies created by players graduating or leaving to pursue other opportunities. That is not always the case. Sometimes coaches will recruit a talented player even if there is not an opening. This is called recruiting over someone. It sounds heartless but it is a necessity in a profession where job security is determined by

coaches' won/lost records. A coach should not do this without thought. Your players have to feel that there is some loyalty within the program. Players cannot be viewed as expendable, interchangeable pieces. Canada is not like the United States where players are given full athletic scholarships worth tens of thousands of dollars a year. A player in Canada will be lucky if the scholarship money she or he receives covers one semester of tuition. Players choose their college for the academic program that it provides as well as the opportunity to play basketball.

The recruiting of new players does not always result in players being replaced. It can, however, result in a player's role being redefined. Sometimes the players coming in have played two or three years of college ball and are ready to play big minutes immediately. Even high school recruits are able to play more minutes in their first year because of all of the summer club and provincial programs that give them the opportunity to play at a higher level. This influx of new talent can cause resentment if an older player feels her role has been redefined. That was the case with this player who quit. Her role had changed even though she was still receiving nearly the same amount of playing time. She was unwilling to subordinate her personal agenda for the good of the team. Perhaps she just thought it was not worth it anymore.

Despite the fact that there is a significant dropout rate of teachers new to the profession, the biggest problem that we face with some older teachers is that they do not quit. Instead they retire on the job. Steffy (1989) labels these teachers as being in a withdrawal stage of their career. These teachers possess low self-esteem, and "...have a pervasive negative attitude toward students" (p. 99). Steffy feels that every teacher will undergo a period of withdrawal at some point in his or her career. If a teacher gets to a

stage of deep withdrawal, it "...can be destructive to children, the system, and to the teacher" (p. 103). These teachers are "...frequently among the last to arrive and the first to leave. They neither participate in co-curricular activities as advisers or coaches, nor do they attend school functions" (p. 104).

Teachers who are in this stage arrive there by many different routes. Some of them are disillusioned by the course their career has taken. They may have been passed over for administrative positions. This can lead to feelings that their contributions are not valued. Some of them may have had difficulty responding to all the changes that have taken place in education and see the pace of change accelerating. They neglect professional development and continue to try and do things like they always have. They can become very cynical and try and belittle their colleagues who embrace change saying that they have seen it all come and go many times in the past. Usually they retreat within their own classrooms and cut off contacts with their fellow teachers. Some of them choose to become the staff critic, hang out in the staffroom and "become a thorn in the side of the administration" (Steffy, 1989, p. 103).

How do I help these teachers who have quit on their students, who have quit on their colleagues, who have quit on themselves?

### Skillful Guidance

The essence of the Monastery Director's work is to revere the wise and include the many, being harmonious to the seniors and friendly with the juniors. The Director should give comfort to the community of monks who share the same

practice, and let them have a joyful mind. He should not depend upon his power or authority and belittle the members of the community. He should not carry out things willfully and make the members of the community insecure.

(Dogen, as quoted in Tanahashi & Schneider, 1994, p. 45)

The shrill sound of the buzzer triggers a joyous celebration on the court. Our boys' basketball team has battled back from a disheartening loss in the zone semi-finals with a hard fought win to capture the third zone berth in the provincial championships. This has been the climax of a long journey back from years of losing seasons. In his first year, our coach withstood a season that saw the Panthers win one game. There has been steady improvement over the last five years that culminated in an undefeated league season and this milestone win. It has been seven years since a team from our school has made it this far. I don't think the players or their parents really understand how difficult this journey was. I leave my seat in the stands at the Lethbridge Community College to go onto the floor to offer my congratulations. I catch the eye of our coach and offer him my hand. Then I change my mind and give him a big hug. He is a volunteer coach who has stuck with our program. As I let him go from my arms I say, "Did you ever think you would be here after that first season?" He simply gives me a big smile and I see the hint of a tear in his eyes.

As I turn to congratulate our players, one of the parents who is standing off to the side motions me to come over. Before I can even say hello he blurts out, "So we've got to get a new coach next year!" His son is in his first year of high school basketball. He is a great kid who is intelligent and has a good grasp of the game even though he is not particularly athletic. He doesn't get a lot of playing time and this has upset his dad.

I know why he said what he did but I get annoyed and ask him, “What are you talking about?”

He is obviously frustrated and continues with, “Well, for starters, he doesn’t know what he is doing.”

This angers me even more because it isn’t easy to find people who want to coach these days. This parent’s attitude is one of the reasons. I am upset that he has taken some of the joy out of this moment for me and I say combatively, “Don’t give me any more bullshit. We are going to have the same coach next year and if you don’t like it, then tell your son not to play.” I start to walk away but turn around and say, “Just who the hell do you think you are?” before stomping off the floor.

As I leave I know that I haven’t acted very professionally. Days later I acknowledge this when I speak to my superintendent about it. He is very sympathetic because he knows that I don’t have to be told I was wrong and he doesn’t criticize me. When we meet with the parent he is very supportive and the situation is quickly resolved with apologies offered on both sides.

I appreciated this and I have always tried to think of this when dealing with a staff member. I greatly admired this leader but more importantly, I trusted him. McKenna and Maister (2002) feel

your effectiveness in being a group leader (or coach) is more about you than it is about the person you are coaching. In particular, your success as a leader will turn on whether or not you are received by your people as a trusted advisor.

(p. 28)

You can't give a teacher unconditional support in every situation. After all a principal has to act as an arbitrator between teachers, parents, and students. However, you can avoid unnecessary criticism. In McKenna and Maister's view, "A true coach is someone who is honest and will tell you something you may not want to hear" (p. 28). The worst thing that you can do is to sweep the whole matter under a rug or simply ignore a problem in the hope that it will go away. Krzyzewski (2000) states, "A little negative thing must be dealt with immediately before it becomes a big negative thing" (p. 103). How you deal with the negatives is a sign of the emotional health of a school. If a school is going to improve, it is critical that the principal offers corrective feedback on performances that could help employees improve. Sometimes principals, and I am in this group, are too worried about whether they are liked. This can have a negative effect on the school. Goleman says that "this 'anxious' type of affiliation has been found to drive down the climate rather than raise it" (p. 65). Sometimes, as Kryzewski says, "This isn't all about 'I love you' and 'Let's hold hands and skip.' It's also about 'Get your rear in gear,' 'What the hell are you doing?' and 'Why aren't you in class?'" (p. 35).

## Chapter 4: The Home Team

### Passages

“OK Dad. I’m ready. Let’s get started.” As she says this, my daughter Kelly strips off the faded yellow sweatshirt with the faded Nike logo and takes a final shot. Her form is flawless. She is a pure shooter and has the kind of shot mechanics that coaches try to teach all of their players. The net’s twine sings its sweet song as the ball swishes through. Kelly and I are in the gym at McEachern School on a cloudless day in July. Outside the heat rises in shimmering waves from the parking lot. Turtle Mountain’s hulking form is framed by the pale blue of the midday sky. Inside, however, the gym is surprisingly cool. I have been warming up by shooting shots at the other end of the gym. We have been at the gym practically every day this summer. In less than a month Kelly will head south to North Idaho College on a basketball scholarship. We are trying to get her ready to play at this higher level of competition. Most days we work on fundamentals such as ball handling and shooting. Today we are going to play one on one. That is the beauty about this game. You can work on your game by yourself or play against one other person and work on the skills that will help develop your game.

My competition with my daughters started when I went jogging with Kelly. What started out as a pleasant run along the pipeline that winds its way through the forest on the northern slopes of Turtle Mountain soon turned into a race. Soon our runs were contests pitting father against daughter. More than once we ended our runs with a sprint to the finish, collapsing when we reached the house. I once thought that I was a decent basketball player. As Kelly grew I started to play one on one against her. At first I would just play hard enough to keep the game close. However, once she got to the eleventh



grade, I had to start playing as hard as I could. Somehow, I had never lost a match of five games to 20 points. The last time we played, I was barely able to hang on for a victory. I can only guess what my motivation was. It is different now. I am only trying to help her. Anyway, that is what I tell myself.

Kelly gets the ball to start the game. Because she has such a good outside shot, I decide that I am going to get in her face and make her beat me off of the dribble. She slashes to her left and I move to cut her off. She then crosses me over and leaves me helplessly out of position as she lays the ball in with her left hand. My turn. I try and take her left but she strips the ball off me and moves out beyond the three point line and launches a shot before I have a chance to react. Swish! The ball snaps the net as it goes through cleanly. Next possession I bull my way to the basket and score. Kelly doesn't say anything but I know that she thinks I have committed an offensive foul by the look that she gives me. In this game you call your own fouls. I look down and flip her the ball. This time she comes right at me and rocks me back on my feet. Using the space that she has created, she goes up and hits a five foot jump shot. Right there I know that I am in trouble. She has given me the message that she won't back down.

Soon I am down two games to none. The games have become very physical and I have resorted more than once to cheap shots to keep her from scoring. She says nothing. I get ahead in the third game when I bull to the basket several times in a row. There are no pretenses now. I know that I can't match her skill so I figure that I will capitalize on my size and strength. Kelly scores to tie the score at 18. The next basket wins. Kelly knows that I am going to try and overpower her again. With my back to the basket, I start to back her down. She gives ground grudgingly. I go to my right and then try to spin back

to my left. As I do Kelly slips her hand in and steals the ball cleanly. After taking it across the three point line she attacks the basket. I step in to block her. She absorbs the contact and then rises up and shoots right over me. My feet are glued to the floor and I can only watch as the ball bounces off of the backboard and into the basket. Without saying a word she picks up her sweatsuit and leaves the gym.

In John Updike's (1990) fourth and final novel about Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, the hero has heart trouble, his son has a drug problem and his wife decides to become a working woman. Harry ends up alone in a Florida condo looking for reasons to live. The highlight of his life remains his high school years when he was the big basketball star. It is a bleak and troubling novel of someone who has been unable to negotiate the passages of his life. The Rabbit feels betrayed because, "He was reared in a world when war was not strange but change was: the world stood still so that you could grow up in it" (p. 419). Velsor and Guthrie (1998) would agree with Rabbit. They state that "someone who is at first well suited for a position or role can, over time, become ill suited, as the job or the organization's demands outpace the person's ability to develop requisite skills" ( p. 238).

Sheehy (1995, p. 243) feels that men don't have to face aging as early as women do because they are engaged in the competitive struggle for dominance in the social hierarchy. However, as men enter their 50s they may find that their career paths have stalled and that their bodies aren't working like they used to. At this stage most men aren't interested in growth, rather they want to stay where they are. They don't want to make the passage to another stage. Emotional needs that have been suppressed usually come to the surface.

Sheehy then describes a “Male Vanity Crisis” (p. 245). She states that for many men losing their hair becomes a big issue because it is the first public sign of weakening. Another issue that she says inevitably provoked frustrated confessions in men’s group interviews was their ability to do sports. She says that this struggle over diminished physical dominance is similar to the struggle women feel over surrendering their youthful beauty. I think that the signs of aging were there long before but that most men prefer to ignore them. I think I came face to face with this crisis when my daughter was able to beat me in basketball.

Many teachers must feel like the Rabbit. Teachers of my generation have experienced enormous continuous change in their careers. As a group they are smart, demanding, and independent people. To keep current, the profession demands that teachers need to invest enormous amounts of time, usually their own time, learning about diverse topics such as differentiated instruction, integration of special needs students, a new marks program, teaching a new course, or using a smart board, to name just a few of the things facing our teachers in the upcoming school year. Steffy suggests that a teacher who is no longer growing in his/her job is in withdrawal. Teachers in this stage experience varying degrees of physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion. They believe that they are no longer in control of their lives and there is a general feeling of distress, anxiety, frustration, anger, and discontent. Velsor and Guthrie (1998) state that “over time, people feel caught in a rut, doing the same thing with the same results over and over” ( p. 238). Very few teachers do not experience this stage at some point in their careers. Most teachers alternate between a state of renewal and a state of withdrawal.

This withdrawal stage could be tied to the life cycle phases that all people experience. Many of the things mentioned in Sheehy (1995) relate to people hitting the wall in their career aspirations. She calls this the “Little Death” (p. 102) that characterizes the transition into another stage. Many of the characteristics that Sheehy describes, including letting yourself go, loss of energy, and chronic depression, can also be used to describe the teachers that Steffy (1989) says are in the withdrawal stage (p. 99).

In 1982 I had been a vice-principal for 10 years when the principalship came open at my school due to the retirement of the previous administrator. I applied for the position but wasn't really surprised when the job was given to someone from outside of the school division. I remember feeling disappointed and a little frustrated. I wondered if I would ever gain a principalship. At this point I made a decision that I needed to look at myself and aim to grow in the profession. It helped when I was able to connect with our new principal. We formed a good team. He needed the information about our school that I was able to provide while I was able to learn a lot from his administration methods. He had a very forceful personality and strongly held convictions on education. He had been brought in to give the school a make-over and he proceeded with alacrity. I didn't always agree with his methods, I thought he tended to be too critical of staff and students, but I admired his energy and enthusiasm and we soon became close friends.

When I look back at it now, this was the key turning point in my career. I remembered the vice-principal of the first school where I taught. He had been passed over a couple of times for the principalship and had withdrawn completely. He still did an adequate job but he was capable of doing much more. I faced that kind of choice and decided that I had too many years left in education to follow a similar course of action. I

grew as an administrator and was revitalized. I also think that I knew deep down that I may not have been ready for a principalship at this point in time.

At a recent administrators' meeting we heard a presentation about a handbook on stress that was produced by the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan. Many of the stress symptoms and related issues such as substance abuse would be more prevalent in the group of teachers who are in the withdrawal stage. Steffy (1989) recommends that systems should have in place a staff assistance program to help these teachers. Sadly, our division does not have these kinds of programs in place.

I don't think that any of my staff are in the deep withdrawal stage at this time, although there are several who have the potential to go there if they aren't helped in the next few years. I am reminded of the case of a popular and very competent teacher who had entered the persistent withdrawal stage. He had become the staff room critic, badmouthing the administration and students alike. He basically quit and took an early retirement package the year before I was transferred to the school I'm at now. He hadn't prepared for his retirement and he ended up taking a part-time position at another school. This teacher might have been salvaged and might have been a valuable member of any staff if someone had taken the time to talk to him. Velsor and Guthrie state that the ability and willingness to learn "... are nourished by coaches, mentors, and work partners who provide encouragement and support in the form of honest feedback, knowledge, and experience" (p. 246).

I gather my things together and head back out into the brilliant sunshine, squinting as I attempt to reduce the glare. Kelly has headed down the road with a firm, purposeful gait. It is eight kilometers to our house but she appears to be determined to get home on

her own. I throw my things into the back seat of the car, hop in, start it up, and then turn onto the street. As I approach Kelly, I slow down, roll down the window and say, “Hey, don’t I know you? You wanna ride?” She turns slowly to face me and then breaks out in a huge smile. I am forgiven but I also know that things have changed. This game has marked a passage in both our lives.

### The Critic

“Dad! Come on!” There he stands at the entrance to the dressing room. He is packing three sticks plus his oversize hockey bag. The big jacket and baggy pants that he wears camouflage his skinny, nine year old frame. His face is shadowed by the ball-cap he wears pulled down low over his eyes. He switches the bag to his other shoulder as he waits for his father and me to walk down to the lobby from the seating area. His team from Medicine Hat has just finished winning their game with a team from Lethbridge. Marcus played very well in the first period but appeared to run out of energy in the second. He upped his level of play at the start of the third period before tailing off again as the game wound down.

Marcus has a late birthday so he is almost a year younger than some of the other players. He is also the oldest one in the family. Birth order does make a big difference. His younger brothers have had a more successful start playing hockey because they began at a younger age and played shinny alongside Marcus and his friends. Marcus didn't start playing hockey until he was in Grade 2. Some players had already played two years by that time. He didn't play a lot of hockey at home. In fact he didn't even know how to hold a stick. He has improved remarkably to the point where he made an Atom A

rep team. He is a good skater but doesn't understand the game as well as some players and doesn't have a good shot.

As I watched him play I became frustrated. He has the skating ability to be an effective fore-checker but he doesn't fore-check consistently, often hanging back. He also stayed out on the ice too long on a couple of occasions, prompting me to yell at him to get off the ice. His coach talked to him about the same thing.

When we reached Marcus I asked him how he thought he had played. He replied that he hadn't played very well because he had failed to score a goal. I then told him a few things that he could work on for his next game. I then found myself wondering if that was my role. Shouldn't a grandfather offer unconditional support? Does Marcus need to be critiqued? Shouldn't he just have some fun?

I thought of that when Marcus said he was hungry. He was also excited about going to the water-park with the rest of the team in the hotel where they were staying. I pulled out a twenty, tugged his hat even lower and said, "Go get something to eat and have fun tonight." Isn't that what sports should be about?

How does this apply to working with teachers? Should I always have a coach's mentality and offer suggestions on how to do things better? I can think of times where I have over-coached and focused on too many details. I can remember doing this with my own daughters. I have only watched Marcus play one game this year. Is that enough time to pick out a pattern? Is visiting one or two classes enough time to get a true feel for how someone teaches? When should I adopt a grandfather's mentality and become a cheerleader? Knowing this is the art of administration and of coaching.

### Goal Line Stand

The ball carrier is finally brought down at the five-yard line and the whistle blows. The coach of the defensive team calls a time-out and the players wearily remove their helmets and take a knee. Russell wipes the sweat that is streaming down from his hair onto his face and into his eyes. It is a glorious fall day with unseasonably warm temperatures. The sky is cloudless and for a change there is no wind. There is a festive mood surrounding the field as the parents, grandparents, and brothers and sisters of the players lounge in their lawn-chairs along the sidelines, taking in this last summer-like day of the year. In the back of the end-zone I can see Nathyn playing a game of touch football with the other boys who are too young to play tackle football. Just beyond that I can see the smoke curling up from barbeques at the concession stand. The atmosphere is laid back as the people watch the young boys and girls who are playing their last game of the season. No championship is going to be awarded. The three teams involved are playing a series of mini-games as a way of celebrating the end of the football season. It is what youth sports should be. No one is screaming at their kids for failing to play up to expectations, no one is yelling at the referees, the coaches are out on the field calling the plays and everyone is having fun.

Russell is one of the youngest players on the field as he is in Grade 4 and most of the other players are in Grades 5 and 6. His older brother Marcus also plays but they are rarely on the field at the same time since Marcus is a running back and Russell plays linebacker. At this level playing linebacker means you stand up on defence instead of getting into a down stance and then everyone rushes the ball carrier. Rarely is a pass thrown. Russell has had a good game. He is muscular for his age and he is fearless about



making contact. In fact he seems to thrive on it. Russell is not the most gifted athlete but he always gives a maximum effort. He never takes a down off and is always in the middle of the action. In hockey he plays the same way always looking at going to the net and into the corners. He trains hard every day when he swims and has been rewarded by winning four medals at the recent summer provincial swimming championships. He is a tough kid as well. Last winter while we were playing shinny, I accidentally caught him with an elbow to the head that required four stitches to mend. He barely cried when it happened and didn't even flinch as they sewed him up in the hospital.

As the time-out winds down, the coach motions towards the bench. Marcus trots out onto the field and joins the defensive huddle. Their team is up by six points and while there is no clock on the field we know that this will be the last series of the game. If the opposing team scores they will win the game. They have mounted a long drive led by a bruising quarterback who has been difficult to bring down for the smaller defenders. As the teams break their huddles I notice that Marcus will be playing as down lineman on the opposite side from Russell's weak-side linebacking position.

The opposing quarterback stands three yards behind the line of scrimmage to take the snap. If form holds and he stays with what has worked, he will take the snap and then run a sweep to his left at the right defensive end position that Marcus is playing. The ball is snapped and the quarterback bobbles it momentarily. Before he can completely control the ball, he is tackled hard for a three-yard loss by Russell who has anticipated the snap count and beaten the offensive tackle cleanly. It is now second down with eight yards to go.

As the coaches huddle up the players, I notice the determination on Russell's face. This game is a fun event but Russell always plays hard and he doesn't like to lose. This time the quarterback moves under centre to take the snap. Russell is inching towards the line of scrimmage as the signals are called. There is no strategy to his game. He simply moves as hard as he can to the ball carrier. After the ball is snapped the quarterback takes two steps back as if he is going to pass and then pulls down the ball and starts to run to a big hole that has opened up in the middle. He hits the line of scrimmage and then is hit again by Russell. He stumbles forward for three yards, dragging Russell with him before help arrives and he is finally tackled. I see Marcus getting up from the pile and a swell of pride courses through my veins. Russell and Marcus have combined to make the stop.

It is third down. There is one last chance for the other team to win the game. This will be the final play of the game. As the teams break their huddles and come to the line of scrimmage, the parents of both teams start to cheer. No matter what happens, there will be no loser in this game. Both teams have given their all. This time the quarterback goes back into the shotgun to take the snap, standing three yards behind the line of scrimmage. He back-peddles while looking to throw. Marcus has dropped back into coverage and has matched up with the running back coming out of the backfield. With no place to throw, the quarterback pulls the ball down again and heads for the end-zone. When he reaches the two-yard line he is tackled hard and the ball pops free. Somehow Russell has made the tackle again. He pounces on the loose ball and starts to run it back but is tackled before he hits the ten-yard line. No matter. The game is over and the boys have hung on to win. More importantly, they have had fun.

### The Natural

A loud, raucous laugh rises above the din of five young boys playing catch in my mother's backyard. I would know that laugh anywhere. It is my sister Susan. She is laughing at my youngest grandson Nathyn who has just thrown a rubber ball with unerring accuracy to me. I throw the ball back. He catches it and then throws it back to me with the same result. I barely have to move my feet to catch the ball causing Susan again to erupt in astonished laughter. Once more I throw the ball back. Nathyn catches it again and then asks if he can move back across a rock garden and flower bed in my mother's yard. His older brothers and my younger sister's two sons, who are older than Nathyn as well, stop their play to watch. Nathyn winds up, takes a step and lets fire. Again he throws with uncanny accuracy and velocity. The ball whizzes through the air and I catch it without having to move because it was right on target. He is the natural. Younger by two years than any of his brothers or cousins, he has surprising athletic ability. While other kids his age played with toys, Nathyn was always tossing a ball around. He spends hours throwing, catching, kicking, and hitting balls and inventing all kinds of games to test his skills. He can throw or hit a ball better than the other boys and he is only four years old. As I continue to play catch with him my mind wanders off.

You can still smell the burning leaves in the air. Three dead pheasants hang suspended from the door to a run-down weathered storage shed, their lifeless eyes staring blankly from their dangling heads. My uncle has just returned from hunting. We are at my grandmother's. It is an unseasonably mild Thanksgiving. I can hear the rest of the family relaxing inside the small house. There are frequent bouts of laughter from the women who are preparing the meal. I am five years old. I became restless and stepped

outside to escape the heat that has built up from the oven. Near the shed I find an old baseball with the grass-stained cover starting to come off. The red yarn from the stitching has come apart and you can see the string inside. I pick up the ball and slowly rotate it in my hands looking for a good place to grip it. As I start walking away from the shed I flip the ball up a few feet in the air and catch it in one hand. When I have marched off 35 feet I turn around, scratch a mark into the dirt with my runner, lift my head up and face the shed. I take a big windup and let fly. Whump! The ball makes a satisfying sound as it thuds into the door of the shed and then falls to the dirt driveway below. I pick it up and make my way back to the mark that I have made. Again I take a big windup and then throw the ball even harder than the first time. Soon I am into a mindless game of throwing, chasing the ball, and then throwing again. Suddenly, I am startled by a shadow. It is my father. I don't know how long he has been watching me. His eyes meet mine and his face breaks out into a big grin. Excitedly, he calls the rest of the men from the house to watch me. He tells them with a father's pride how hard I can throw a ball. I am pumped up and can hardly wait to show off. But I try too hard, forget to get my legs into it, and end up overthrowing the ball. I can't generate the speed or the accuracy that I had when no one was watching. My dad doesn't say anything but I sense that I have disappointed him.

Skip forward six years. I am ten years old. A group of ball players and a couple of guys in open-necked sportshirts, who are smoking cigars and drinking beer, are gathered around home plate. We are in Edmonton because the team that my Dad is the playing manager for is in the provincial fastball championships. I am the bat-boy of the team. I watch silently as a noisy argument erupts that seems to centre around my father. Money

changes hands. My Dad hands his balljacket to me and picks up a fastball. The bet is that he can throw a ball over the centre field fence from home plate. He gets three chances.

He loosens up a little, moves ten feet behind home plate and then takes three steps and lets fly. The ball soars up and out, falls about 6 feet short of the low picket fence, and then bounces over. Close but not good enough. The men erupt into more heated discussions and then more money changes hands. My Dad picks up another ball, spits on it and rubs it into the cover. He sets up again and launches himself into the throw. This time the ball seems to rocket from his hand. It easily clears the fence with 15 feet to spare. There is loud laughter and cries of disbelief as the accounts are settled. My heart swells with pride as I run to retrieve the ball that I will keep in my room.

Nathyn winds up again and I see my father who was dead years before Nathyn was born. A great-grandson who has the same natural gift as his great-grandfather.

### The Shoot-Around

“We won championships at Duke because of what happened behind closed doors”  
(Christian Laettner, as quoted in Krzyzewski & Phillips, p. 85).

The team has gathered outside the doors to the gym, waiting for the Calgary team to finish their pre-game shoot. It is a ritual in the Canada West Conference that on game days, teams have a short practice to get some shots in and to go over things for the evening’s game. They have already spent an hour looking at the game tape from last night: a 13-point loss in which they hung in until the final five minutes when Calgary pulled ahead to stay. The mood is upbeat as they banter back and forth while getting their runners and practice gear on. Shannon spent hours going late into the night breaking

down the game tape and coming up with a game plan for tonight's game. Some of the girls have their copies of the plan and are going over them one last time before heading into the gym. The key to tonight's game will be how Lethbridge handles Calgary's zone defence, whether it be a 2-3 or a 3-2. At the tail end of last night's game the offence had become stagnant as the Pronghorns struggled to get ball movement and good looks against the stifling Calgary defence. After the game Shannon was upbeat because she had liked the effort she received from her players, particularly in the first half when the two teams raced up and down the floor in a highly entertaining exhibition of women's basketball.

The Calgary team begins to filter out of the gym. They are smiling and have a confident air about them as they have a streak of five straight wins against Lethbridge over the past two years. This is a different team but they saw the Pronghorns wilt under their late defensive pressure and are probably thinking that tonight's game will be no different. The University of Lethbridge players grow quiet for the moment it takes to walk past their opponents and head into the gym. I say hello to the Calgary coaches and then take a seat on the first row of the bleachers. I could sit in the much more comfortable chairs on the team bench but I want to be as unobtrusive as possible. Shannon quickly gathers her team together and starts the practice because they only have one hour before the men's team gets the gym, and she has a lot of things to go over.

The first thing that they do is a transition drill that serves to get them loose and run out the kinks from last night's game. Then the work begins in earnest. The first topic addressed is post defence. Last night they overplayed players in the low post when the ball was above the foul line and it resulted in the ball being lobbed in over their heads a

number of times for easy baskets. Shannon demonstrates the defensive technique she wants her post players to use. I am a little bemused by this since Shannon is in the later stages of pregnancy, but she is determined not let it slow her down. She plans on only taking a week off if things go right so that she can be with her team. She has five new players this year and she doesn't want to bail out on them because she feels an obligation to them. Next up are some shooting drills. The forwards and posts work with an assistant coach at one end of the gym while the guards work with Shannon's other assistant coach at the other end. The drills are specific to their positions so that the guards are working on their outside shooting while the forwards work on their post moves nearer to the basket. Without stopping for a break, the team now begins to work on their half-court sets against the zone defence that Calgary is sure to employ at some point of the game. Shannon goes over Calgary's set and talks specifically of their players and their roles and what the Pronghorns have to do to adjust to it. She has her second team set up in Calgary's zone and then has her starters run their offensive sets against it. She stops the action frequently to give instructions. She doesn't want her players to move like automatons, rather she is trying to teach them to read the defence in order to take advantage of any weakness.

As I watch the give and take I get misty-eyed. It is so rewarding as a parent to watch your daughter do something that she loves so much. She is a wonderful coach. She knows her Xs and Os so well and understands the nuances of the game far better than I do. For example, how altering the angle of a screen just a little opens up a lane to the basket far more effectively. More important are her communication skills. She is a natural teacher, as most good coaches are, and she has the ability to establish a rapport with her players. She can be tough when she needs to be tough but she also has the ability

to use humour to make a point. In the video session one of her young players who is right out of high school wondered about a foul call that was made on her in last night's game. Shannon showed her the play in which she had dived for a ball and landed on a Calgary player's head. Shannon said that while it was close most referees would probably make that call. The rest of the team laughed as did the player involved. She had made a point without ridiculing her player and had some fun at the same time.

As the practice proceeds I am impressed with the work ethic of the players and how they are bouncing back mentally from yesterday's loss. I think they are gaining confidence from this practice because they feel they have been well prepared for what may come in tonight's game. As the practice wraps up with a few free throws you can't but help notice how the mood has changed from the time they entered the gym. They were somewhat subdued as they entered the gym as Calgary was leaving, but now they are livelier and more relaxed. Bennis says that followers need three basic qualities: they want direction, they want trust, and they want hope (Bennis, 1989, p. xii). Shannon has given this team direction and hope for the evening's game. The trust will come in time and with a few wins.

In baseball it's a perfect game, but in basketball, the effort turned in by the University of Lethbridge women's basketball team defied description--by players, coaches, and onlookers alike.

Avenge a 13-point loss the previous night with a 32-point win-- and a mindnumbing 93 points scored--and how would you describe it?...From defence to offence, from rookies to veterans, all was in perfect harmony for the



Pronghorns as they dismantled the University of Calgary Dinos 93-61 in Canada West play at the U of L gym.

An overused cliché at best, “team win” is the only way to categorize the assault. All 11 Pronghorns scored and all 11 gathered in rebounds, which might be the underlying reason for victory.

“It really was a team effort,” said Shannon Finnie. “Our starters came out ready to play, and we had good minutes off the bench. I thought we executed the entire game, and we never had the mental lapses.” (Yoos, 2003, p. B1)

The score of the game in sports gives you an immediate feedback. That isn't to say that a team can't play its best and still lose or play poorly and eke out a win. But coaches have a mentality that leads them to constantly evaluate their team's performance and the individuals who are part of their team. Should not schools and teachers do the same?

### The Jacket

Forgive me. For loving you. I was afraid I could not bring you back from the dead so I let go. Though I watched and watched and dreamed of your return, I wasn't strong enough. I thought your dying betrayed me. I doubted you. Doubt myself. (Wideman, 2003, p. 217)

The acrid smell of smoke permeates the air. I look out the front window and see the flames licking around the summit of Turtle Mountain. I keep staring as if trying to wish the scene away. Twenty minutes ago we were served with our evacuation notice. The Lost Creek Fire has raged out of control for a week now and it is inexorably

approaching the town. We used to take comfort in the swath the pipeline carved through the forest as it snaked its way 100 meters to the south of our house. Now we know that the sprinklers set up along its length will not be enough if the winds blow from the south. We have 40 minutes to gather up what belongings we can and then get out. The notice hasn't been unexpected and we have already packed up the personal mementos, such as pictures that can't be replaced. I take a last look in the basement and the jacket catches my eye. It is hanging on a nail near the furnace where it has hung undisturbed for nearly 25 years. It has a green melton body with golden leather sleeves. On the front is a chenille crest--a crown below which run the words "Alexander Hotel Monarchs 1967." Below that runs a thin second crest emblazoned with "Alberta Champs." It is the jacket our fastball team received for winning the Alberta junior championships 36 years ago. It is in near mint condition as I have not worn it often.

My father was the coach of that team. He was already coaching a senior team when he decided to start up a junior team. Lethbridge had a good junior team that had won some provincial titles, but as the players grew older they moved up as a team to the senior ranks, leaving a gap in the junior ranks. My father's senior fastball team was the dominant team in Lethbridge from the late fifties right through the sixties. He was very busy operating that team but took a look at the young talent that was coming up and decided that he would give them a chance to play. There were times that my father's commitment to fastball was a problem for the family. Summer activities, including holidays, were planned around a ball schedule. Coaching two teams would further complicate matters.

My father was an old-school coach. He was very demanding of his players. Our practices were grueling with a lot of emphasis placed on conditioning and hours spent working on the fundamentals of the game. My approach to coaching in my early years was modeled on his approach to the game. He was particularly demanding of me, which I resented at times. I was held to a higher standard or so it seemed to me. I had to earn any playing time that I received. He would not hesitate to take me out of a game if I made an error, particularly if it was a mental error. I often had to sit on the bench, including the provincial championship game. I had a difficult time understanding why he was so hard on me.

It was only much later that I understood his rationale. If he had favoured me it would have created problems for me with my teammates. As it was they never thought I had special privileges. When it came time for me to coach my own children, I adopted the same approach. I figured if I was very demanding with them then I could ask more from the other players. As I held the jacket in my hands it finally hit me. The only reason my dad had formed this team was to give me a chance to play. I hadn't realized it until this moment. I never thanked him for doing it before his death. I was angry when I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to my father. I was angry that he had died. Most of all I was angry at myself for not telling him how much I loved him. Slowly I folded the jacket and put it with the other clothes that we were taking. It took over thirty years for me to realize how special this jacket is.

## Chapter 5: Overtime

### Remembrance

I bend down and pull the old work boots on. Art, the architect, gives me a hard-hat and tells me to adjust the strap but it feels fine. Along with Danny, our caretaker, we are going for a guided tour of our school, which is undergoing a massive renovation.

The sky is a blinding blue as I enter the building. I have to squint to give my eyes a chance to adjust to the dim light. I can make out the shrouded boilers that were in the furnace room basement. The room has been opened up in order to make the changes that the new mechanical and air systems will require. Art gingerly peaks his head around a corner to see if any equipment is coming and then leads us into the shell of the building. The building has been cracked open like an egg and all that remains in the interior are the rust-red structural steel roof supports and a tiny section of interior wall. Light streams in the front part of the building from a gaping open section where the walls have been removed. This will be the new main entrance. It consists of a double stairway and atrium. The vista is breathtaking. You will be able to look out across the valley to the mountains beyond. This will be the focal point of the school where students will be able to gather. Our school was in many respects a dull place without windows to bring in the light. Art points to seven large holes in the roof where skylights will be installed. You wonder what the reason was that a school was built with hardly any windows when surrounded by panoramic vistas.

I can hear the rat-tat-tat of a jackhammer ripping out what little remains of the floor in our old shop area. I walk through a door into what used to be our east hallway. The sky opens up as the roof is missing. Danny points to water dripping from one section

of the roof and jokes that it is still leaking like it used to all the time. I look down into bare dirt where they have been excavating to put new washrooms into the gym.

As I walk on the barren concrete floor I try to imagine what the school will look like when it is finished. There is no doubt that it is going to be a warmer, friendlier environment, and I get excited when I think of the possibilities that it will open up for our students. But it does sadden me to think that there is so little left of a building that served two generations of students in the Crowsnest Pass. The opening of the Consolidated High School in 1971 marked a milestone in the history of the Crowsnest Pass. It was the biggest step in the formation of a united community. It could be argued it was a more significant step than the amalgamation of the Pass that took place a decade later. For the first time, students from throughout the Pass were brought together into a central location. The bitter rivalries that had divided the communities of the Crowsnest Pass began to disappear. It was also a leap of faith in the future of the Pass. When the age of coal was over in the late 1940s and early 1950s, an exodus similar in some respects to the Okies migration to California described by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* took place. Pass people were forced to leave because of the mine closures. The late sixties saw prosperity return to the Pass with the development of mines on both sides of the border and some secondary industries lured to the area with government subsidies. Now all that is left of a building that served the students of the Crowsnest Pass so well is the gym and the amphitheatre. At the first *Reaching and Teaching Conference* I attended, I heard Terrance Deal speak of the importance of history and tradition in schools. In the rush to move out, we didn't take the time to celebrate the legacy of this school building. Yes, we made sure to take some pictures but our gaze was on the future rather than the past. When

the University of Maryland closed their storied gym, the Cole Field House, they marked the event by passing a basketball between members of all the teams that had ever played there. The ball was passed again when their new field-house opened to symbolize the connection between the old and the new. As the principal of this school, I should have ensured that we did more to commemorate the school's past. We need to honour our past when the school reopens and build upon the foundations put in place by previous staff and students.

### Epilogue

“The pauses between the notes—ah,  
that is where the art resides!”

(Artur Schnabel, as quoted in Jackson, 1995, p. 169)

This project has been with me a long time and much has happened in the year-and-a-half since I first started to work on it. Inertia set in during the first year and I accomplished little while I wrestled with the direction that I wished to go to complete my Masters. I had done some journaling but I could not seem to develop a focus with which I was comfortable. I knew that I wanted to write about leadership from the perspective of a coach, but I found the principal as coach metaphor difficult to sustain because the coaching style only occupies one slice of the leadership spectrum. Sports have always played a fundamental role in my life and I knew that it had played a major role in my administrative career, but I could not find the core around which my writing could grow. After I had just about given up and decided to go the exam route or the action research route, I met with my advisor and during the course of our discussion the concept of team

building was bandied about. Immediately I knew that this was something that I wanted to explore further.

My understanding of team building has changed. I think that when I began, I was looking for a formula that would help explain how teams are built and how they evolve. What should have been obvious was that team building begins with the personal relationships that you establish as an administrator or as a coach. That is where you must start and it takes time. You can't expect to read a slick book on leadership written by a successful leader in business or coach, copy their style and make it yours. As I looked at my career I realized that the strongest teams that I was part of were the teams in which the members trusted one another, communicated with each other and cared for one another.

As I wrote this project I found myself recalling events and people whom I had not thought about in years. The process of writing triggered more memories. As Bill Clinton (2004) puts it, "While writing, I found myself falling back in time, reliving events as I recounted them, feeling as I did then and writing as I felt" (p. 952). Writing has helped me to put my career into perspective and look at the role sports played in shaping it. Richardson (1994) would say that the "...writing is a process of discovery" (p. 523). I have begun to develop my voice, which in turn helped me to better understand the way in which I approach my profession.

But it was and also is a journey that I made alone. As van Manen (2002) states, "To write is a solitary experience, a solitary and self-forgetful submersion in textual reality" (p. 3). I have yet to share my writing with my family and friends. Perhaps I was

afraid that I would never complete the journey as I fought through periods when I wrote little.

It was and is a journey that has helped me to reshape my vision of what a good school should look like. My vision is, to use DuFour's term, that of a community of learners who share their knowledge with each other much in the style of a Jack Donohue. It is a school where people are recommitting themselves to developing their professional skills much in the same manner that my daughters would spend hours in the gym over and beyond regular practice times in order to hone their skills. It is a school in which people are excited about the start of a new year and are not just going through the motions and counting down the days until they retire (such as the teacher I overheard remarking that he had only 768 days left until he retired). It is a school in which the people are working together towards defined goals, using a gameplan similar to the one we used to win a provincial basketball championship. It is a collegial school in which the people enjoy one another. I agree totally with Barth (1990) who states that "The quality of adult relationships within a school has more to do with the quality and character of the school and with the accomplishments of students than any other factor" (p. 163).

The reading that I did for the project was essential for grounding my writing. I have always read leadership and coaching books and articles but never with a purpose in mind. I was able to re-read many of these sources and many others. They helped to ground my writing. Van Manen (2002) uses the term "insight cultivators." He writes that they



...give the writer a sense of “I see” and help (a) to interpret lived experiences, (b) to recall experiences that seem to exemplify these insight cultivators, and (c) to stimulate further creative insights and understandings...” (p. 125)

I first contemplated using an essay format after writing about my remembrances of the Cuban Missile Crisis during one of my classes in the master’s program. I was in Grade 9 at the time and I could always remember the conversations the members of my junior high basketball team had about what we would do in the event of a nuclear attack. Writing about that moment triggered many other long forgotten memories of my school years. I hoped that writing about my career in teaching and coaching would open up more memories and help me better examine and perhaps understand my career. As Wideman (2003) states, “As I look back at my life, I understand in a flash that recovering the past is reclaiming the past” (p. 198). I do think that the writing has helped me to reclaim my past and, as Barth (1990) writes, “...see common practices in school not as encrusted regularities, as wallpaper patterns but rather as tentative decisions subject to continuous examination and review” (p. 169).

The story is not done. This project is “...a process rather than a definitive representation” (Richardson, 1994, p. 524). Van Manen (2002) calls this aspect of qualitative writing openness in the sense that, “...no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final” (p. 237). My career and life continue to evolve. I have a new grandson. My daughter no longer coaches at the University of Lethbridge. My friend, Don, has moved to Vancouver Island. A forest fire forced us out of our home. I have just finished the first year in our new school and I have just returned from an exchange trip to Japan with a group of our students. I am looking forward to the

concluding stage of my career and am eager to develop my leadership and team building skills. This project has helped me along this journey.

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