

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: The (old) boys are back ? and getting slower and older!

By Stephen Somerville

A number of years ago I decided to try and find somewhere much closer to home to play hockey ? those late Sunday night games in Toronto were killing me the next day!

Luckily enough, a friend asked me if I wanted to play organized ?pick up? hockey on Sunday afternoons at Pickering College.

I didn't know what to expect at the time, but I said, ?Sure.?

We don't have referees or timekeepers or scorekeepers.

One of the guys acts as a convenor, and instead of throwing the sticks in the middle of the ice as we used to do as kids to determine the teams, he chooses the sides while we are in the dressing room.

We have about twenty guys, all shapes, sizes, ages and levels of ability ranging from not very good (moi) to guys who played Junior ?A? hockey.

I have been playing with this group for almost a decade now and I have never had a more enjoyable experience.

The guys are funny, and just like the eight year old boys we used to be, we still like to use a little trash talk.

And we still have the enthusiasm of youth.

We forget all our cares and concerns for that one hour. And what a glorious hour it is.

What I appreciate most is no coach yelling, ?Somerville, for the love of God, would you pretend to back-check just once this season?, or my all-time favourite, ?Somerville, these are not ceremonial face-offs, you are actually allowed to win one of them, you know?.

We always kid each other that if you don't play well, you will be sent down to the minors. Leaf players can get sent down to the Marlies; the only thing lower than our league is public skating!

And having your friends as the goalies is always great for the ribbing and bragging rights that goes on during the rest of the week.

I also play hockey in the Tuesday night over 50 League in Aurora.

We have two officials, and an official time keeper.

During the first game this year I was (honest truth!) ?minus three? after the opening shift.

I was the starting centre who lost three draws in quick succession and the puck was in the back of the net three times before the game was one and a half minutes old. I wanted to stay out on the ice for a fourth ? but my teammates thought that I had done enough damage for one shift.

What follows is a partial transcript of the conversation I had with a player from this hockey team a couple of years back:

Stephen: What's this on my shirt?

Other Player: Somerville, we haven't even got on the ice yet and you're already complaining. Sorry that you didn't get the ?C?, but we were thinking of giving you an ?A? ? for ? (can't print this due to The Auroran being a family newspaper) ? but the seven-letter word used has the same last four letters as foxhole. You get the picture.

Stephen: Thanks for that Mike, now you just wait until I tell your sister (a.k.a. my wife) how you treat me. No, I am not complaining about my lack of team status but how come my shirt has a small patch on the front that says ?old timer?. I don't mind if it says ?terrible player wears this shirt?, but not ?old timer?. I only want to be called an old timer when I can get into the movies cheaply or get my hair cut at a reduced rate?.

These Sunday afternoon and Tuesday evening one hour games are like a fountain of youth ? carefree and fun. I wouldn't miss it. Just don't call me an ?old timer? though.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com