

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE:

By Stephen Somerville

I like to believe that neither my wife nor I have ever been accused of being either 'helicopter' or 'lawnmower' parents.

I had not even known these two terms existed until a friend in the U.S. told me about them.

A helicopter parent is one who is always hovering around their children and are ready to take action as soon as they see a problem occurring.

A lawnmower parent clears a path for their children, even before it happens, so the kid doesn't even know about the issue.

The lawnmower parent is far more dangerous to the health and future wellbeing of the child as they do not let the child fail.

I know that it is tough to sit there and watch little Sally or Johnny get cut from a sports team, so a parent makes sure they don't go out for the team or tries to force the coach to pick his son/daughter for the squad.

Although I don't believe that I have ever been a helicopter or lawnmower dad, that does not mean that I have not been, on more than one occasion, a stereotypical hockey dad.

You know him: He's the guy with the stop watch making sure this eight year old son is getting the same amount of ice time as the kid next door. Or he is bellowing at the 13-year-old referee of his son's house nine-year-old league hockey game that he missed a call.

We are embarrassed by him and his behavior and we don't make the mistake of sitting beside him again at future hockey games.

I will confess that I had become that stereotypical 'hockey' dad that I said I would never, ever become.

Only I was not a hockey dad; I was a golf dad.

I have always loved the game. My father played, and we would watch it together on Saturday and Sunday afternoons in the 1970s and 1980s. I learned the game by caddying for my dad then graduated to playing.

Twenty-five years ago, I would play twenty plus rounds a year and I was becoming a better player. Then came work and business-related travel obligations, being married and a son.

My now fourteen-year-old son Ryan took up the game about six years or so ago. He would come with Julie and I to hit some balls at the range. He then graduated to playing the executive course at Kettle Creek. Then, one day we went to St. Andrew's Valley and he played eighteen holes on the big course.

I was proud of him as he walked up the tee and smacked it down the middle with his little driver.

We have been playing and practicing a lot together since then.

I entered him into his first tournament when he was nine and he now plays in many tournaments all over.

One day stood out in particular.

Ryan was playing in a tournament in Niagara Falls.

The first day of competition had winds gusting up to 90 km/hour. It made the British Open legendary weather seem mild in comparison.

My son had a difficult time with the wind 'as most of his competitors did. As a result his score was higher than he hoped.

He was not allowed to have a caddie.

I should have been a cheering father who was showing him support, but I was not.

The look on my face was not good. I was not happy with the way that he was hitting the ball.

In fact, when he hit one ball under a tree where I was standing he said something and I said, 'Stop hitting it under the damn tree and keep it in the fairway.' The look on his face said it all.

I thought a lot about the way I was and I have not let it happen again.

Although it is hard.

Unlike hockey, where your little boy or girl is part of a team, your little golfer is by themselves out there.

I am very fortunate that I have a son who seems to have found a sports passion that my wife and I can partake in.

Going forward I will simply offer encouragement and continue to count my blessings that I am able to watch his love, skill and appreciation for the game of golf grow.

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