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MACLEAN IN ST. CATHARINES: DIONNE’S GREAT ASSIST

BY RON MACLEAN ON DEC 14 2014

My highlight of last week’s visit to Sudbury, notwithstanding a visit to the amazing Science North museum, was a post-show pit stop at The Doghouse pub.

Calgary Flames player development coach Troy Crowder once owned the joint. Laurentian University Voyageurs coach Craig Duncanson and I stopped in for “one.” The place was filled with adult league hockey players enjoying wings and a pint.

Wednesday, after the Jean Beliveau funeral and a corporate outing in downtown Toronto, I dragged myself to pick-up hockey in Oakville 40 minutes to the west. Those Doghouse boys were my motivation. I also thought of pals of mine who drive at least 40 minutes each way, every Wednesday to play the 10 p.m. game. How could I not show up for them?

Two of our players, Murray Scott and Todd Anderson, drive up from St. Catharines each week. Their trek is roughly an hour each way, and as a result, they rarely drop in for a post-game pop. But this week, Murray did. So we chatted about Saint Catharines. Murray explained that beyond the hockey, the place is renowned for world-class rowing and lacrosse.

He has coached the St. Catharines rowing club and at the school level for years. We talked about new recruiting methods, concerns about passion versus production in sport and the mandatory sports requirements of schools such as Ridley, where participation in a sport was once compulsory, but no longer is.

Everyone is trying to sort out, with all the social networking and possibilities for kids, just what will keep a child playing, learning, and doing something to make an impact, to have a purpose. This got me thinking about three men with ties to St. Catharines who have inspired me.

The first is the legendary Marcel Dionne. One night I was out to referee a Junior C O.H.A. game in Glanbrook, ON, and in the lobby was Marcel. He was helping coach Chippewa.

“Look at that guy, always smiling,” he said to me.

In one simple phrase, the hall of fame player, lifted me to that place a compliment takes a person. Marcel had that gift. In Los Angeles, he took rookies Luc Robitaille, Steve Duchesne and Jimmy Carson under his wing. He made Charlie Simmer and Dave Taylor stars. There’s only one other individual I can think of who did as much to inspire excellence in others and not receive the proper recognition, and that’s Jacques Lemaire.

Dionne was a spectacular player, a team player, wise and fun.

The other two people from St. Catharines who have had a huge influence on me, I have never met. Gino Arcaro is a football coach who owns a gym in Welland, ON just down the road. He has written several books, and blogs, and his message essentially refutes the idea that the score-board is the last word.

He sees the score as a mere snapshot or summary of the past, and he has little time for its verdict.

Gino is all about the ripple effect of effort. He explains that the clock hitting zero, and the final score being posted simply represents the opportunity to get back to work.

This view connects with the other mentor I know, but haven’t met, Jason Dorland. Jason was an Olympian in 1988 in Seoul, Korea. His men’s eights rowing team had a disappointing sixth place result, but as Gino would have understood, whether Jason knew it or not, that was not the final word. It started Jason on a wonderful journey he details in his book, Chariots and Horses.

The former Ridley student has gone on to a career in coaching and public speaking since that sixth place finish in Seoul.

Jason soon realized that all the hate he had been using to psych himself (for his rowing competitions) was not easily mustered twice in one sitting. Perhaps that kind of motivation was a problem? In the years since he has learned that hate and revenge are terrible reasons to chase victory. He now teaches to stop reaching for wins and fearing losses, and to make fun the foundation of the experience.

Says Jason: “When we feel safe to fail, when we have that freedom, we fail less often.”

The only guarantee of a great effort each and every time is when love is at the heart of it. There’s no better example of that then what we saw this past week in Montreal.

For obvious reasons our celebration of Jean Beliveau this week included the profound gratitude Guy Lafluer had for Beliveau’s guidance when Lafluer was suffering growing pains.

Those two men are inextricably entwined in the lore of our game and Les Glorieux. At the very same time Jean was pulling Guy through hardships, out in Los Angeles, a St. Catharines Black Hawk, the equally brilliant Marcel Dionne, was helping others in the same boat.

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