

I wish that some poor soul, with nothing better to do than to watch a 40 and over men's beer league, had videotaped our game. I'd love to see how we look, how I looked. Not because, as a 53 year-old participant, I made it through without a heart attack, broken limb or (more commonly over the past half-decade) a sore back, aching groin, bad shoulder, wonky knee or suspect wrist. No, not because of that sort of minor miracle. But rather because I was good! I was, I really had a game tonight. Nothing to call the scouts about, nothing that even warranted a free beer at the bar, though that would have been a welcome surprise. But it was the kind of game I would have liked my sons to see me play, or been seen by the boys I coach. There was hustle, there was effort, there were some smart plays and some skilled passes and ultimately I popped our team's first two goals of the game. So all in all it was an excellent game. Here are the details, you have to have details.

We had some good pressure and I had a nice give and go from behind the net with left-winger John and he just about beat the goalie short side. We had a nice 3-way pass which ended with right-winger Tony getting robbed on a great chance on the doorstep. But we finally broke through with a goal that was a simple 3on2, I stayed high and John dropped it to me, Tony drove the net to provide a screen and I fired it into the corner low glove side for an easy one. The goalie never saw it, thanks to Tony. Next shift John created a turnover a few feet from me, just their side of centre, and as I saw it unfold I broke up ice and he slid it up and joined me on a 2on1. It was a great transition and I wish I could get my players to recognize and anticipate like we did. Now when someone creates such a nice turnover, and is kind enough to give you the puck, you want to repay them, you want to give it back. So as I came in left side, on my forehand, I really wanted to slide it back to John, hopefully right in the wheelhouse so he could step into it. But maybe their D saw the good citizen in my eyes and he was giving me the shot and taking away the pass completely. Maybe the goalie saw it a bit too and he pulled off the post just a bit. My best option changed. High blocker I thought: I can could hit that top corner. Now keep in mind that most times I look to go high blocker, or high glove, or high anything for that matter, I hit high chest protector, right where the team crest is so gloriously printed. It's the skill level that I have, or at least have now after years of diminishing talent and ability. I'm okay with that. Why am I okay with that? Because occasionally I don't hit the logo, occasionally I hit what I'm actually aiming for and tonight was one of those fortunate occasions where I snapped it under the bar, just inside the post, high blocker where Mama keeps the cookies. I didn't celebrate of course, it's not cool to do that in beer leagues where the only true celebration is that we are still playing this great game with terrific friends. But oh was I celebrating in my head! In my head I did the Ovechkin jump into the glass, the Jagr salute, the Gretzky fist pump, then a Tiger Williams stick ride half the distance of the ice followed by a Theo Fleury slide. It was spectacular. The jump / salute / fist pump / stick ride / slide in my head was spectacular that is. The goal was merely pretty damn nice. So I turned casually to be congratulated by John, apologized for not passing ("no way, they were cheating on the pass, you had to take the shot" he says) and go back to line up at centre, trying not to grin more than I should. You can't let it show too much after all.

But I had a 2on1 shortly after with Tony and by God no way was I going to shoot, it just wouldn't be decent no matter how nice a hat trick would have felt. And keep in mind that there are no hats to be thrown as there are no fans in the stands so really, where's the incentive to bury number three? But the

D was trying to take the pass away. He was almost telling me to shoot. So instead I loft a 9 inch saucer pass over his stick and wonder of wonders it sits right down on Tony's stick and he hammers it at the net. This part of the story should end with another understated goal celebration but alas Tony hammered it right into the crest of the goalie's jersey, where the best of us usually shoot. Was I disappointed? Of course not, I did my part, I made a great pass. But maybe I was a bit slow to pass the water bottle to him on the bench when we went off.

Following the game we undress, joke (Harry was passing gas due to his meatball dinner. Rich is sitting closest to him so notices first. Harry is usually passing gas, the only factor that varies is what he had for dinner that has produced said gas), shower, and check to see how many guys are hitting the bar for a well-deserved cold beverage. Usually it's half of the team. The game is fun, the banter in the room is often hilarious, but for those that hit the bar the relaxed atmosphere provides an important wrap to the game and a bond for the guys that go. John was back from a trip to Hawaii so there was lots of talk of that and input from those that had been there too. Anthony is our goalie, a super, solid guy, and he has been so he had lots to say about his trips. He also had a shutout tonight so we talked about their near misses and his great saves. Anthony had also talked about a TSN top ten he had seen that had us remembering the great character Eddie Shack (Clear the track, here comes Shack!!). Paul used to be paid to play in France, met and married a local French girl and they came back to Canada and raised a family and both taught in high schools until his recent retirement. He's trying to unload a property he owns in France that has become the permanent home to someone that was supposed to be paying him rent but has decided that a Canadian landlord is a perfect situation if you want to pay sweet f#### all and not worry about being evicted any time soon. Paul drinks Labatt 50. That is a small surprise considering how beer tastes have changed from the days when 50 was the go-to wobbly pop of our fathers in the early to mid-seventies when Foster Hewitt and Dave Hodge were the faces on the screen for Hockey Night in Canada. No, the bigger surprise is that the bar still stocks it. Fausto is the toughest competitor I know, he used to be my assistant coach in West Carleton and he hates to lose anything, the game, a battle, a trash talk, an argument with the ref. But nobody back checks harder (and makes the rest of do so out of guilt). Or remembers the old players of our youth, like Shack. And he always goes to the bar, a sign of a true team guy. Of course Harry and the bar are found in the same sentence most of the time. Yes there are liver jokes and the like. And just about anything someone talks about reminds Harry of something sexual. I missed last week's game, must have been something sexual. John talking about scuba diving in Hawaii? There was a sexual reference. A young woman sitting next to him on a recent flight while his wife was a couple rows away? Yup, sexual reference there too. The barracuda Anthony faced when he was snorkeling? Well, you see the trend. Harry linked the nasty teeth of the big fish to something else sexual. Oh I don't need to explain it do I? It should be obvious. Harry is a master at making the leap. And that's not meant to disparage him, we laugh our asses off at what he says.

I know, I know, this is a bit of a corny rendition about the guys at the bar after the game. Yes there is a bartender, Dave, and he brings us our nachos for free. I feel there should be someone humming Piano Man in the background. But please allow me the indulgence, it's a good time and it's a great moment that we need to have. I wish there were more of them.

There was also a cute young waitress names Fallon (yes, practicing politics ...) who was there through Thanksgiving and some of the guys are not seeing Dave's excellent service and friendly chatter as a suitable replacement. Harry would be one of those guys.

Too bad James was out of town this week and missed the game, he truly is the funniest guy on the team, possibly the oldest, and he has this deft way of offhandedly slipping in some comment that has you involuntarily spewing beer through your nose and crying at the same time. Brett was away tonight too, he's our goal scorer so it was nice to get some even though he missed, and he always comes to the bar too and has a habit of snorting instead of laughing along with the rest of us. Which is just more funny.

Jeff and Steve don't always come out but they did tonight. They are big, fast brothers who play D and carry the puck like an adult playing keep away from kids on an outdoor rink. Somehow the talk came around to a time where Jeff was not shy about picking up an opposing player who might have been too free with his stick and body slamming him to the ice. He didn't do that tonight. In fact he hasn't done it more than once that I can recall, and it was 2 or 3 years ago, but come on, a body slam like that gets remembered and it doesn't take much to have it mentioned by someone in the group. We lot of age 50+ hockey warriors have memories that hold details like that, where a single unique or sensational play gets etched in our minds and we pull them out like pictures of our children time and time again and we smile and remember them just as fondly. Like I will hold onto the top shelf goal of tonight, and someone will mention it later this year and probably a few years again from now: remember when Andy looked off John on a 2on1 and put that puck right under the bar. Surely followed by a crack about why I hadn't done it since.

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