

Coaching the Braves Way: Brad McMahon

By Neil Milbert

When the Wilmette Braves' Peeewe 1 coach, Brad McMahon, was the same age as his players he skated for the Chicago Minor Hawks, the only AAA travel team in the Chicago area at the time.

The Minor Hawks' trips sometimes took them to Canada for tournaments, and McMahon will never forget what happened at one of those tournaments.



“It was around Christmas time and there was a buzz around the lobby that there was a kid from Brantford, Ontario who had scored somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 goals,” McMahon reminisced. “We ended up playing against him and he scored four goals against us.”

That was Brad McMahon's introduction to Wayne Gretzky.

During his 14 years of coaching youth hockey Brad hasn't developed the second coming of The Great Gretzky but that's irrelevant. He has given his players a better understanding and appreciation of the game. He has helped many of them prepare for high school hockey careers and

some of players have gone on to play in college.

This season 32 of his former players are skating for New Trier and Loyola.

Brad and his wife, Debbie, live in Glenview and he got his start as a coach as an assistant with the Glenview Stars. Two years later he became the Stars' head coach.

Eight years ago he came to Wilmette where he has been head coach of the Peeewe Double A team for six years.

What does he enjoy about coaching the 11 and 12-year-olds who play at the Peeewe level?

“The Peewees are at the age where you can begin to teach them the mental part of the game, the conceptual part,” Brad replied. “With Mites and Squirts you are primarily teaching them skills and positioning.

“Peewees are ready and mature enough to be challenged with regard to time and space. Fast and skilled hockey players are always good hockey players. Those among them who know timing and spacing can become great hockey players. The differential between good and great players is understanding and anticipation.

“Most players who play high school hockey will not go further. But they’ll remember the big games they played in—whether it be in high school or back when they were Peewees.”

Not only is Brad regarded as an outstanding player development coach, he also is considered a great bench coach. He finds ways and means to win games.



Twice during Brad’s coaching career he has led his team to the Northern Illinois Hockey League finals, once with Glenview and last season with Wilmette.

“Both times we lost the championship game but four or five years ago my Wilmette Peewees won the President’s Cup for finishing first overall,” he remembered

“Getting to the finals last year was absolutely rewarding but some of my most memorable experiences as a coach are not the games but the road trips where I’ve been able to spend time with the players and get to know them.”

Brad grew up in Winnetka and began skating at outdoor rinks in Wilmette and Winnetka. He started playing hockey as a Mite, then joined the Chicago Minor Hawks and spent seven years in the Triple A ranks.

At the time there were two high schools in the township, New Trier East and New Trier West. In his sophomore year at New Trier West, Brad left the Chicago Minor Hawks to focus on high school sports. He was an All-State defenseman in hockey, an All-State forward on the soccer team and a third baseman and a catcher and third baseman on the baseball team.

“I’m a great believer in competing in multiple sports,” Brad said. “But it’s challenging today because kids’ sports have become year-around. Those conflicts we face today as coaches and players didn’t exist when I was growing up.”



After high school McMahon continued his education and hockey career at Northern Arizona. He played on the 1981 team that won the National Club Hockey championship and after Northern Arizona started a Division I program he “played a few games as a junior” before deciding to concentrate on academics.

Brad earned his degree, returned to the North Shore to work, got married and started a family.

He has four children—Dan, a senior at Missouri; Reid, a sophomore at Iowa State, where he is a goalie on the club hockey team; Jack, a freshman at Indiana; and Annie, a freshman at Glenbrook South who plays travel soccer.

“I started all three boys in hockey, got into coaching and stayed with it,” he said.

Away from the rink, in real life, Brad is a sales manager for Staples.

His job, his coaching avocation and watching Reid’s Iowa State games on the Internet keep him very busy,

Nevertheless, now that all of his sons are in college he has more free time on his hands and sometimes will spend it watching his former Pee wee players compete on the Wilmette Braves Bantam team and checking out Braves’ Squirts who will be moving on to his Pee wee squad.

END ALL