

Coach's Tribune by: Adolph Brink

Life is always changing.

When my wife and I decided to say goodbye to Branford last August, a lot of unknowns were lurking ahead of me.

Coaching had been my constant since I stopped playing myself in 1987. I had played hockey since I was five and I was very lucky to play in incredible hockey places like Choate, St Lawrence University (ECAC), Kingston Canadiens (OHL), and a few other minor league stops. Everyone stops playing. Some are told while some figure out on their own. My reason was that it was starting to feel too much like a job. Bus rides, bad food, and the faces of "old" 27, 28 & some 30 something year old veterans talking about missed chances. I loved the experience and the chance to play but not the prospect of growing "hockey old". Not me.

I knew hockey had more in store for me. Oh yes it did.

Hello ND-Fairfield. High school hockey coach. Assistant. The energy of the



kids was awesome. Squeak in as 16 seed (needed 10 wins to get in then). Being a prep school product, crowds were never there. 16 seed... sure easy... we won it all at the Hartford Civic Center. I still remember Dave Burr scored the most amazing goal I've ever seen a high school player score, to date. State Champs. So young. So dumb.

Fast forward to a few more years at NDF and then off to the evil empire of Prep. Nine years there. Part of three state championships and always to the semifinals. Winning was fun but the reality of politics set in. So Prep was done with me, philosophical differences I was told. Code words for unhappy well connected parents. That was it for me for coaching. There was no purity left in the game I loved. Summer came and my old youth hockey organization called. They needed a bantam coach and I heard they were pretty good. Some kid named Quick was the goalie. I agreed. My wife of three years and my two year boy urged me do it. They knew I didn't want to be done. After two years there, the Fairfield Warde/Ludlowe Co-op came calling. They were not the evil empire. They were barely a team. Five years there, three trips to Yale and a loss in the finals. The fire had returned. It wasn't the wins or losses, it was the team culture we developed. They helped through the loss of my father. We played Greenwich at Dorothy Hamill the Monday night we buried him, a 3-1 loss but never prouder than having my team at church that morning. I had made a difference with them and they were there to make a difference for me. That's when I knew what it really was to be a coach.

A coach...

Well, my hometown Branford High School's head job became available after five years in Fairfield. So I went home.

Coaching and living in town was 24/7/365. Seven years there. Three SCC championships, three trips to the Whale. My son and his friends playing for me. Fun? Yes. Stressful? You bet. As a coach you never want to know everything. Branford is small and people and social media have taken the shroud of teenagers away. It's a new world. But the hockey was always the best part. Kids want to be kids and they give us old timers the energy to share.

They carried me through the loss of my assistant and better man Mark Cunningham. Life isn't fair. But hockey was there.

But now after nearly 30 years, hockey isn't there everyday for me from Thanksgiving to hopefully March. My good friend Jim DiNapoli has that charge now. He's a lifelong friend, 42 years. He's getting the life force from these Hornets. Good luck boys.

It was my choice. My time to leave was on my own terms. Do I miss it? Yes and no. No, to the changing culture of sports in general. I'm an old school guy. But yes, to the excitement of a new season through the eyes of a high school hockey player. Today all teams are equal. On opening night all the realities start to set in. I smile because that excitement will never be taken away from these kids. It happened every year for me for 30 years and I'm sure the feeling will never die for these players. I got a text yesterday that said "Coach, can I text after the game on Saturday? It will make me feel better letting you know how I played"

Player, text away. Thank you for letting me part of your game.

Good luck to all and enjoy the moment.