

## IT'S ALL IN A STATE OF MIND

By: Jim Owens

Ok... so I hesitated to write this. Then wrote it and hesitated to submit it. Then I thought what the heck - It's a CT HS hockey story and maybe someone can use it down the line. As they say, "Pay it forward."

A little history, I started playing hockey in 1970, a Cheshire kid with no town rink at the time. My dad got up at 5:00 a.m. to lead a blurry-eyed kid to his hockey bag to get dressed. Together we would venture off to the Taft School rink in Watertown for practices (Thanks Dad!). I remember thinking it was crazy but I loved it. The silence of the early morning rink, the cold, dank smell, the sight of a clean sheet of ice, the first step on the ice, the sound of steel meeting ice with each stride and then the silence broken by the thunderous echo of a slap shot crashing against the boards. Game on!

The youth hockey experience was fun, then came high school. The Cheshire High hockey team was very good in the late seventies. In fact, our team played in three state championship games from 1977-79 all against Fairfield Prep.

1977 - DII - Fairfield Prep 4 Cheshire 3  
1978 - DI - Cheshire 6 Fairfield Prep 5  
1979 - DI - Fairfield Prep 3 Cheshire 2

An amazing three years for both teams! But my story starts before one game in 1979, only our second year at the DI level. We played the historic, powerhouse Hamden team earlier that year and were beaten soundly (I believe 9-3 if memory serves). A pounding, a strong, confident DI team giving it to a DI newcomer. Then comes tournament time. Our team struggles at times but gets through the first two games (beating Greenwich and ND). Semifinal time, and guess who is up next? Yup, Hamden.

The stage is set, February 28, 1979, 7:30PM at Bennett Rink in West Haven. To say we were nervous was an incredible understatement. In a fleeting memory, I can see us in that locker room, the false bravado as a group "We got this!" but individually it was more like "Oh boy!" Then comes suit up time each boy getting ready for battle in their own way, some singing, some nervously chatting, others quietly lacing up their skates. Then the pre-game talk. This started the same as usual and I'm sure you all have heard it many times before. "Line so and so is starting...two man fore check...first man body...second man get the puck!" Then, "wings stay in your lanes...back check the crap out of them...headman the puck...hit the open man...bust to the net...shoot low...screen the goalie," typical stuff. Then it happened, one of our coaches, Jim Toomey (one of the great ones!) walks to the center of the locker room and pulls out a piece of paper. He starts reading. It's a poem. I remember thinking to myself is he really reading a poem? I mean we are a bunch of kids getting ready for the biggest game of our young lives. I looked around and most of us had a puzzled look on our face and almost started to laugh. Then we heard the words, they flowed, they made sense, it went like this:

If you think you are beaten, you are  
If you think you dare not, you won't,  
If you like to win, but don't think you can  
It's almost a cinch you won't

If you think you'll lose, you're lost  
For out in the world you'll find,  
Success begins with a fellow's will  
It's all in a state of mind

For many a game is lost  
Before even a play is run,  
And many a coward fails  
Before even his work is begun

Think big and your deeds will grow  
Think small and you'll fall behind  
Think that you can and you will  
It's all in a state of mind

If you think you are out-classed, you are  
You've got to think high to rise  
You've got to be sure of yourself before  
You can ever win a prize

Life battles don't always go  
To the stronger or faster man  
But sooner or later, the man who wins  
Is the fellow who thinks he can

At the end, in his best Herb Brooks fashion, Coach Toomey says something like “Who thinks they can?” “It’s all in **your** state of mind!” “Each one of you!”

For me, and I’m sure for most if not all of us in that locker room that night, it clicked! We were ready to bust through a brick wall! That was it. Our team played a near flawless game, something we had to do to win.

Final score: Cheshire 4 Hamden 2

I will remember to this day the handshake line, the most honored part of our game. We were beside ourselves with joy and our opponent utterly dejected. But the pure respect in that line was as all should be after a hard fought excellent hockey game.

At the end of the line was the late, great Hamden coach Lou Astorino, a legend, he kept saying “Great game, you guys played a great game, Congratulations and good luck.” Wow we won!

Now, I am not saying that reading a poem or any locker room speech wins a game. But when you hear the words and you are in that moment it surely motivates you. Most every player and team has had a game or two where they are in the “zone” and things click. More times than not I contend it is because you are in that “State of Mind”. You can’t be beat. It may not happen often but when it does it is a thing of beauty.

When I looked back on it I wondered why I hadn’t heard the poem before. But I realized it is not something you bring out every few games or even every year. It is for that special occasion, the Biggest of the Big.

Fast-forward a few years to March 2011. Ironically, I am now on the Hamden side. My playing days are over save for a pickup game here or there. I am now a hockey parent. It is the CHC Youth Hockey Squirt A State Tournament. My son is playing for Hamden in the state final. I thought about that poem. I searched for and found it after all those years. I printed it and before the game gave it to the coach, John Mendes. I said: "Read this." The next thing I know a parent/coach is coming out of the kid's locker room shaking his head with a puzzled look and says "He's reading a poem to the kids?" I laughed to myself as I thought of all those years ago and I wondered if these kids would even understand it. The team played great and won the state championship.

So, over the years the poem has become quite special. As young men in the late 1970's it fired up a talented but inexperienced team to work with extreme effort. As young boys in 2011, who probably failed to capture the poem in its entirety, they certainly understood the last line...."The man who wins is the fellow who thinks he can." And as adults, parents and fans it is and remains a life lesson.

Funny how a fleeting memory and seven words can stay with you all these years....

### **IT'S ALL IN A STATE OF MIND!**

To end, I would like to thank my dad for planting the hockey "seed" in my brother, my sister and me. He and my mom have spent tireless hours driving to practices and games. They have given countless pep talks and years of continued moral support. You will still find them in rinks throughout New England cheering on their grandsons and granddaughters, enjoying the "harvest". Thanks Dad and Mom... Love you! They are not alone as our CT hockey community is full of passionate folks who continue to make this great sport thrive.

So, when you find yourself in your "Biggest of the Big" moment go ahead find the poem, use it and continue to...Pay it forward.

"It's All In A State of Mind" by: Walter D. Wintle

Below you'll find the actual bracket and standings from the 1979 season.

1979 HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

DIVISION I

Preliminaries

Hamden	1	
BYE		
Site _____		
Time _____		Date _____

Wilton	8	3
Darien	9	9
Site Ridgefield		
Time 7:30		Date 2/21

Cheshire	4	3
Greenwich	13	2
Site Cheshire		
Time 8:15		Date 2/21

Stamford	5	2
Notre Dame	12	6
Site Stamford		
Time <del>8:45</del> 7:30		Date 2/21

New Canaan	2	
BYE		
Site _____		
Time _____		Date _____

Simsbury	7	3
Amity	10	1
Site Glastonbury		
Time 7:45		Date 2/21

Enrico Fermi	3	
BYE		
Site _____		
Time _____		Date _____

West Haven	6	1
Fairfield Prep.	11	8
Site West Haven		
Time 7:30		Date 2/21

Quarter-finals

Hamden	12
Site Hamden	
Time 2:00	
Date 2/24	

Darien	2
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Cheshire	2
Site Cheshire	
Time 8:15	
Date 2/24	

Notre Dame	0
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New Canaan	3
Site Darien	
Time 5:15	
Date 2/23	

Simsbury	5
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Enrico Fermi	1
Site Cabell Twin Rink	
Time 7:30	
Date 2/23	

Fairfield Prep.	14
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Semi-finals

Hamden
W. Haven
Site <del>Hamden</del>
Time 7:30
Date 2/28

Cheshire
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Simsbury
Site Hamden
Time 7:30
Date 2/28

Fairfield Prep.
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Finals

Cheshire	2
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Site Coliseum
Time 2:15
Date 3/3

Fairfield Prep	3
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## 1979 CIAC ICE HOCKEY TOURNAMENT RATINGS

DIVISION IRankings

## Record vs CIAC Opponents

<u>School</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Won</u>	<u>Lost</u>	<u>Tied</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	
Hamden High School	1	14	1	0	.933	
New Canaan High School	2	17	3	0	.850	By lot
Enrico Fermi High School, Enfield	3	17	3	0	.850	By lot
Cheshire High School	4	16	3	0	.842	
Stamford High School	5	15	3	2	.800	
West Haven High School	6	10	3	0	.769	
Simsbury High School	7	15	5	0	.750	By lot
Wilton High School	8	13	3	4	.750	By lot
Darien High School	9	12	4	2	.722	
Amity Regional, Woodbridge	10	13	6	0	.684	By lot
Fairfield Prep. School	11	13	6	0	.684	By lot
Notre Dame High School, W. Haven	12	13	7	0	.650	
Greenwich High School	13	10	5	3	.638	

DIVISION IIRankings

<u>School</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Won</u>	<u>Lost</u>	<u>Tied</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	
Watertown High School	1	13	4	0	.764	
East Catholic High School, Manchester	2	8	3	0	.727	
Suffield High School	3	13	5	1	.710	
Westhill High School, Stamford	4	14	6	0	.700	By lot
Rockville High School, Vernon	5	14	6	0	.700	By lot
Wethersfield High School	6	13	7	0	.650	
North Haven High School	7	12	7	0	.631	
Masuk High School, Monroe	8	10	6	0	.625	
Farmington High School	9	11	7	0	.611	
Norwalk High School	10	11	7	1	.605	
North Branford High School	11	11	8	0	.578	
Glastonbury High School	12	9	7	0	.562	