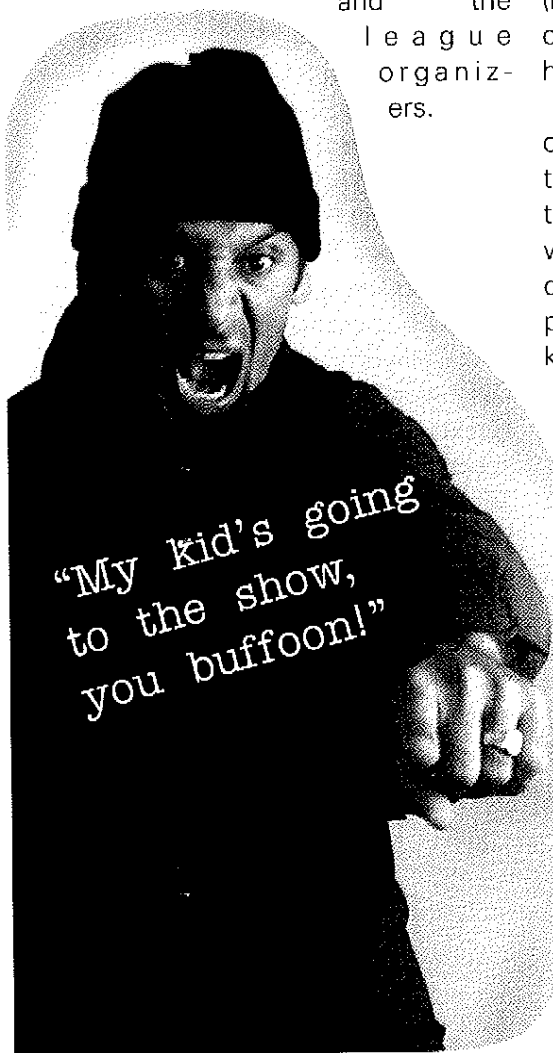




# You want your kid in the NHL?

## Great, but screaming at everybody isn't helping

It's likely that you've heard them. The shrill bunch. You know the ones, the ones who constantly berate the officials, the coaches and the league organizers.



"Your missing a great game, ref!!!" is another.

"My kid's going to the show, you buffoon!!!" is yet another.

(NOTE: When they yell at league officials, they usually employ the help of a lawyer.)

They're the crazy parents. The ones who believe that their kid, and their kid alone, would already be in the NHL, if the stupid referee would call the game better or if the coach had a clue about his power play or if league organizers didn't keep "My precious Wayne Jr.," off the Triple A travelling team.

"There aren't very many of them," said Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson the other day. "Studies have shown that only about two or three per cent of all hockey parents are a problem. Trouble is, for the other 97 or 98 per cent, the problem parents taint the atmosphere.

"As an association, what we continually have to work on, is giving the vast majority of parents, the good parents, the proper tools to deal with the problem parents. We need to give the good parents the ability to say, 'Hey, cool it!'"

Nicholson has heard all the stories and he's seen, first hand, all the craziness that can take place at kids' hockey games. He'll be the first to tell you that every parent wants what's best for their hockey-playing children, it's just that no one needs to get in a fight over

what's best.

First of all, one must understand how difficult it is to become an NHL success.

A study done by the University of Toronto a decade ago concluded that the chances of a 12-year-old "elite hockey player" (that's the best of the best across the country) making it to the NHL are 1 in 3,333.

That same study also concluded that only three per cent of the elite 15-year-old players in the world will ever play a game in the NHL. These are the kids who have ground it through every level, have been identified as top players in their cities or provinces and are, by the opinions of many of their coaches,



**Bob Nicholson, president, Hockey Canada**

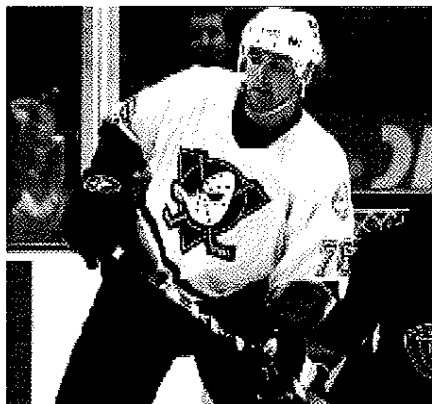
destined, for "greatness."

Yet only three out of every 100 get to The Show.

Meanwhile, there is another little bit of reality to grasp. According to the same study, a couple of generations ago, nearly half of all 15-year-old Canadian boys continued to play the game until they were at

If you've spent any amount of your child's hockey-playing life at the local rink, you have, on a few occasions, at least, heard their rallying cry.

"Give my son more ice time you clown or I'll have your job!!!" is one of their calls.



**Winkler's Dustin Penner. 'The kid no one wanted' was cut twice in Triple A midget, cut twice in MJHL, was a walk-on at Minot State and then scored 9 points in 13 playoff games for the Anaheim Mighty Ducks.**

least 18. Today more than 83 per cent of those who start playing hockey as an eight-year-old drop out by age 15.

That's sad. And it's sad because there is a belief out there that if a youngster hasn't been drafted into big time junior hockey by age 15 – Grade 10 – the kid is going nowhere.

"Yeah, I've heard that stuff before," laughed Nicholson. "Here's the real deal. We are well aware that there are many late bloomers out there. We know that a lot of kids don't get growth spurts until their mid-teens. That's why we started the oft-criticized 'Canadian Model,' for junior hockey. Five years ago, there were 1,200 16-year-olds playing major junior hockey. Today there are fewer than 400. And that number is steadily dropping. We've put in place mechanisms that get us back to reality. That reality is this: Going through the minor hockey system is not a sprint, it's a marathon.

"And always remember this.

There are so many hockey scouts out there, that very few players fall through the cracks. If you are committed to the marathon, if you want to play at a high level badly enough and you are prepared to do the work, don't worry, somebody will notice."

It's true. Eight-year-olds don't make it to the NHL. But no matter what your minor-hockey career has been like, if you keep grinding, you can reach the stars.

Just ask Winkler's Dustin Penner. Penner has been called "the kid no one wanted." He was cut by his local Triple A midget team twice. He was cut twice by the MJHL's Winkler Flyers. The WHL didn't want him and no U.S. college wanted him, either. He ended up as a walk-on at Minot State University, a junior college in Bottineau, N.D.

Penner played his first season at Minot State and then, the following summer he and his dad drove nine hours from Winkler to Saskatoon for a summer prospects camp. He didn't think he'd get a look, but what the heck? Nothing ventured, right?

But as luck would have it, he DID get a look. Maine University Black Bears coach Grant Standbrook happened to be at the camp.

"Why don't you come to Maine?" Standbrook asked. Penner was dumbfounded. He was, after all, 20 years old and had been working for a year in a gas station in Winkler.

"Yeah, why not?" Penner figured.


After a year at Maine, he was signed as a free-agent by the Anaheim Mighty Ducks. This past spring, he was absolutely outstanding in the Ducks run to the NHL's Western Conference final collecting three goals and six assists for nine points in 13 games.

"Dustin Penner is proof that if you want to play pro hockey and you're good enough, somebody will find you," said Nicholson. "So don't worry about your kid's future. Let him have fun. He'll find his own way.

"What worries me is that parents don't look in the mirror. They need to do that. They need to look in the mirror and ask, 'Is this my kid's dream or is it my dream?' Let your kids have their own dreams. Your only job as a parent is to guide them in the right direction.

"Hockey is a wonderful game for learning life skills and proper values and gaining friendships. It should be a lifelong sport not a means to some crazy end."

There you go mom and dad. Stop yellin' at the ref and quit worryin' about the coach. The fact of the matter is this: If your child is good enough, an NHL team will find him. Both the history and the studies show that your only job is to support him and give him the encouragement to keep playing.

Now, let's go have fun.. 

### Hockey Canada Player Registrations 2005-2006

B.C	43,993
Alberta	59,110
Saskatchewan	28,013
Manitoba	23,472
Hockey Northern Ontario	5,343
Ontario Hockey Federation	221,535
Ottawa District	28,658
Quebec	88,824
New Brunswick	15,955
Nova Scotia	17,487
Prince Edward Island	6,024
Hockey Newfoundland/Labrador	8,322
Hockey North	4,429
WHL	490

**Total 551,655**