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Lobster Fishing

One of the many friends I met through basketball in this country is a gentleman named Dana Russell. In the summer Dana runs a whale watching business on Grand Manan Island, which is located off the coast of New Brunswick in the Bay of Fundy, near the American border of Maine. One must take a 90 minute ferry ride to reach the island. As long as the fog is not in, it is one of the most beautiful trips one can every take. You can feel life slow down. For two summers I went over and ran a basketball camp for Dana. As payment for running the camps Dana would take we out watching the whales. This is one of the most moving experiences you can have. To see a humpback whale breach, rise completely out of the water and crash back with a tremendous splash, is one of the most awe inspiring moments in my life. When whale watching is done and lobster season starts Dana coverts his whale watching boat into a lobster boat. When he goes out to set his traps he is often in waters that are close to the U.S. border. When hauling in the traps one day I couldn't help but notice that Dana was closely inspecting the lobsters. I knew from my lobster fishing friends in Nova Scotia that you had to play close attention to the size and gender of the lobster. What Dana was doing was different. After inspecting the lobsters he would place some in a bucket with a lid, but the others he placed in a bucket that did not require a lid. Being the curious sort I had to ask Dana why the two buckets; one with a lid and one with out.

"It's very simple Mike, some of these lobsters are American and some are Canadian. We need to keep them separate."

Thinking this was so he did not break some international treaty I asked him to explain.

"There's no treaty involved, it just those American lobsters are so competitive they always crawl out the top. That is why you need the lid."

"Why don't you need a lid for the Canadian lobsters", I asked.

You don't have to worry there Mike, if one of them Canadian lobsters starts to crawl to the top the others will pull him back down."

Now like any good Maritimer I might be stretching the story a bit, but it is interesting to listen how people talk about people who are successful. In the world of coaching this idea of pulling others down is regretfully often true. When I first started into the game Ian McMillan, one of my future mentors, ran a very successful high school program at Windsor High school. The secret to his success was that he got the players in the gym to work on their game. Once in the gym he taught them the skills needed to play. If you talked to other coaches this was never mentioned. They would always concoct conspiracy theories as to why his teams were successful. When I became involved with the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation it amazed me how much time at meetings was spent in trying to bring the top programs down to the level of the weak. When you look at the governance documents in most associations the majority of the legislation is dedicated to the rules and regulations designed to ensure "fair" play. New rules are usually voted on each year to catch someone who has cheated and gained an advantage the previous season. I will be the first to admit that we cannot condone cheating, but when some one is

successful because they want to work hard this is another story. Every sport seems to have a program that dominates. The similarity is a dedicated coach who has a passion for the sport and helps the student athletes to develop. Those who promote mediocrity always want to legislate to make it fair. Their definition of fair seemed to be:

- I want the same benefits as those who are successful.
- I want my program to win.
- I don't want to have to put a lot of effort into this process.
- People should recognize and reward me for my time and effort.

When I was involved with school sport these people were all lifetime educators. It always bothered me when they would not apply the same standards to other areas of school life. In academics no one every complained about the top students and how much time they were spending on their school work. The same also did not apply to the arts. No one every stood up in a concerted and yelled at the band director to put in the backup trumpet players because the top ones were getting to much playing time. The audience never yelled at the director of the school musical to put in the understudies because the leads were too good. For some reason sport always seems to have separate rules. The main reason for this is that there is a winner and a loser and it is done in public. When one program wins the questions are often asked as to why the other side lost. As I stated in my last BLOG it is human nature to accredit behaviours to the other person and a situation to my condition. He wins because he cheats; I lose because of the situation in my school.

One of the main reasons I knew it was time to move out of coaching high school was the erosion of excellences in schools. My guiding mission was to teach students life lessons through sports. It was becoming increasing difficult to teach the lesson of commitment when students did not have to make a commitment. It was difficult to teach responsibility for ones actions when students were constantly being rescued and not being held accountable for their actions. People wanted excellent results with mediocre effort. How come no one ever asks for the mediocre carpenter to do renovations on their house? We never want to have the mediocre doctor look after our loved ones. We never ask a friend to recommend a mediocre restaurant when looking for a place to eat. Why is excellences seen as a dirty word in sports. As I have stated before, this constant struggle between participation and excellences is one of the main factors in hindering the development of sport in this country. The amount of time and effort that is wasted at the administrative level rehashing the same old topics year after year is frustrating. Discussions on topics that can really impact the sport rarely get covered because someone always feels something wasn't fair in the competition structure.

A word of caution! Excellences is not in the outcome it is in the process. People are too quick to place the label of excellences on coaches and players that win. This is not always the case, especially in dealing with youth sport. Someone who goes out and collects the most talent at younger ages will most likely win. This does not make that program excellent. Just because players win when they are young it does not make them excellent. It usually has to do with who is stronger or faster. Puberty will level out the playing field. We don't put people in the Hall of Fame because his /her team went 30 -0 with their mini-basketball team, but if over 30 years that coach has developed good people we

should sing his /her praises. Excellences comes from the process of training and learning the qualities one needs to excel in all aspects of their lives. This takes time.

Mistakes will be made. During development it will not look like the adult model. This is not only true of players. The same is true of coaches and officials. Too often people in the stands expect developing officials and coaches to act like what we see in the NBA. As Don Cline the president of CABO, our national official's association has said; "An official is expected to start his/her first game as perfect and then get better after that." This is an unrealistic expectation. A starting coach and official will not handle every situation to perfection, it takes time to learn. Like fine wine, if given the right care when they are young they can become excellent with age.