

# Has the time come to start paying coaches?

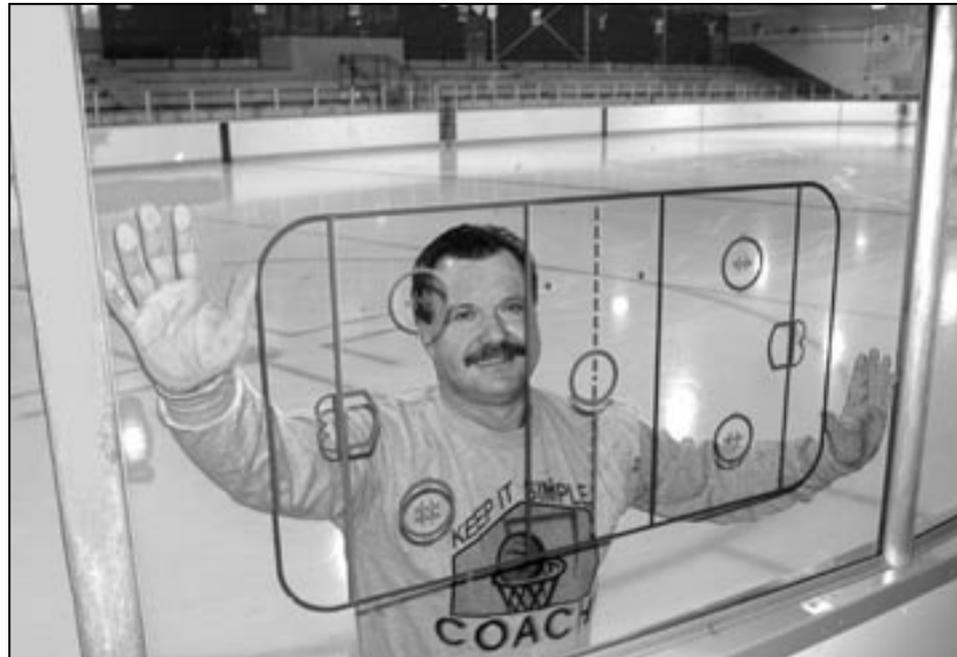
When it comes to what happens on the ice or in the field, most parents of minor sports players seem content to wrap their hands around a steamy-hot coffee, and trust the coaching to the volunteers.

Peter Pastorek of Orleans is a parent who watches minor sports coaches and players with his own understanding and professional coaching instincts. While the former Olympic coach blends in well with the other moms and dads, he notes the varying degrees of skills development among the players. And when he relays what he sees as the shortcomings of fundamental coaching practices - even at the recreational house league level - it is sometimes a humbling exercise for volunteer-driven associations to suck back on the medicine and still pay close attention to what Pastorek has to say to them.

If Pastorek's diagnosis of the state of minor sports seems overly critical, his remedy might seem - at first glance - downright unachievable. "Maybe its time to start paying coaches," he says without even the slightest concern for how this radical thought might rock the volunteer-driven minor sports community to its financial foundations.

## OLYMPIC DREAMS

Peter Pastorek is passionate about good coaching. His Olympic experience as athlete and coach in the sport of



Former Olympic coach, Peter Pastorek has some radical ideas about minor sports coaching. He is the founder of KEEP IT SIMPLE COACH and believes it is time to put some focus (and some dollars) behind the bench if minor sports are to nurture Olympic hopefuls.

handball (1970-1980) was a primer for a highly developed understanding of top level coaching and pool-development for Canada's future Olympians. His own daughters' activities in Gloucester area minor hockey and soccer, has kept him actively coaching in his community. In 1999, Pastorek developed a series of tools to be used as aids for professional and minor sports coaches wanting to improve their own training strate-

gies. His company, KEEP IT SIMPLE COACH, markets highly successful scaled-down playing surface decals and KISC coaching diary playbooks. (Every arena in the National Capital region displays his decals, and he has shipped thousands of the decals to U.S. pro and amateur associations.)

But Peter's entrepreneurial publishing prowess is motivated by a desire to see coaching at the minor sports level in Canada change - fundamentally.

## DRILLS VS SKILLS

Back in the bleachers where the time is ticking away, Peter Pastorek can ignore over-zealous parents yelling past his shoulder at the players on the rink. After all, "you don't need to have a Level 1 or Level 2 certificate to be a parent". But he is focused on a volunteer coach perched on the team bench, lungs straining toward his players with play-by-play commands, instructions and ineffectual reprimands.

"Coaches can't teach skills from the benches, during a game," said Pastorek. "Kids learn skills in practice and in the game they demonstrate the skills they've learned."

Pastorek also points to young players who have been coached well, executing plays and requiring the enthusiasm - but little instruction - from their coaches. "Good coaching is about lighting the fire within, but more important, it's about teaching skills".

Pastorek is an advocate of drills that focus on the minute details of a sport's technique.

"It's important to develop the individual skills of each player to benefit team performance. Practice. Practice. Practice is the key. But practice does not always make perfect. Practice does, however, make permanent."

Pastorek says, so techniques taught improperly, or deemed as being unimportant by coaches and trainers not only can, but will have long-term consequences to a young athlete's development. "Only perfect practice makes perfect," meaning the coaches need to be well trained and well prepared for each team practice if players are to develop. Understanding positioning and technique, and the repetition of movements are fundamental to learn-

ing the skills of any team sport.

## THE PAYOFF OF PAYING MINOR SPORTS COACHES

The idea of paying elite level minor hockey coaches to run skills workshops deserves some examination, according to Pastorek - particularly when, every four years we collectively bemoan the poor showing of Canadian athletes in the summer and winter Olympics (a subject Pastorek is all too familiar with). As a former Olympic coach he has known the hunger for the luxury of having a large pool of candidates from which to draw elite athletes. That pool can only come from grass roots sports development - and that puts the onus squarely on minor sports.

But is this what parents have in mind when they enroll their children in minor sports? Pastorek (a parent himself with two daughters who entered sports at the house league level) said, "Just because a player signs up for house league doesn't mean they shouldn't learn good sports skills." And there is a developmental component that goes beyond the sport. With emphasis on improving and "tuning up the drills, skills and methods of minor sports coaches, the players have an opportunity to learn skills that will take them far beyond being a good player".

"Kids look up to their coaches like no one else - not teachers, or parents, or even friends. How the coaches coach, how they behave behind the bench, has a huge impact on a child. If the coach is a yeller, the kids will tend to follow suit."

A small investment and a few hours of highly specialized coaching early in a team's development can change the direction of that team's performance. It can impact the volunteer coaches and players who will continue working together throughout the remainder of the season, having learned professional training methods from coaching experts who, unlike volunteer coaches, can be held accountable for how they coach.

So who pays for these crucial early-season coaching sessions? Pastorek does the math related to a team attending a typical out-of-town invitational tournament. "Each family will spend about \$500 (\$8000 for a 16 player team) to go to a tournament where the team will play maybe three games. Each player will see about 10 minutes of play during each game." Out of that, Pastorek points out; each player will likely handle the puck for about 2-3 minutes. "Teams talk about the important experience of playing in tournaments, but is that good economics?"

Pastorek advocates teams foregoing one tournament a season, parents pooling half the money that would have been spent on registration fees, accommodations, food and transport, and running a one-day skills workshop - paying select coaches from their association to work on fundamental skills and demonstrating highly developed drills that the team's volunteer coaches can then use to develop their own coaching skills.

Pastorek sees it as an investment in the team's performance by enriching the skills of both coaches and young skaters.

An advertisement for "KunSkat Ski &amp; Skate Exchange Now On". The top part features the "KunSkat" logo in a stylized, bold font. Below the logo is a black and white photograph of a skier in action, wearing a helmet and goggles. To the right of the skier, the words "Ski &amp; Skate" are written in a large, elegant script font. Below that, "Exchange Now On" is written in a bold, sans-serif font. At the bottom left of the ad, there is a small quote: "When it's the best you need, it's the best Professional WINTER SKIING".