

# CHRIS DEALS WITH IT

episode notes




## EP 60 - All Roads Lead To Beer League

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*All roads lead to beer league. It's an adage I've used time and time again at the hockey rink. Sports are full of fascinating topics, so on today's episode I'm starting local: Sharing five reflections on beer league hockey.*

### 5 Reflections

1. Effort can beat talent (sometimes)
2. The rink is a powerful relief valve
3. Parking lot beers
4. The scouts have all gone home

## 5. The moments write themselves

# 1. Effort can beat talent (sometimes)

- The result of a beer league hockey game is as close to irrelevant as it gets. There won't be a game recap online the next morning. No highlights. There's rarely anyone in the stands. The refs often don't care. Heck, in many cases every team in the league will make the playoffs.
- Yet for the people playing the game: It still means something. Guys will put their bodies on the line to block shots, they'll skate full-out, they'll mouth off to their opponent in ways they'd never do outside the rink.
- How we play, both individually and as a team, can tell us a lot about ourselves:
  - Are you the type of person who always gives consistent effort?
  - Do you revel in scoring the goals, or defending your team's net?
  - Is your mentality to never get outworked?
  - Are you setting a standard for your teammates by voice, by example, or at all?
  - Or do you tend towards being the wild card, the chaotic force that's sometimes needed.
- A hockey team, like any other team, is a complex system of individuals.
  - Every team has a unique and complex range of skill, experience, energy, and drive.
  - Navigating and managing these complex systems of people, and witnessing how others do it, translates into managing complex human relationships outside of the rink.
  - Teams evolve over time. Players move, drift away, and new players get added. The team integrates players into the fold and the dynamic shifts.
- One of my favorite philosophical concepts is the Ship of Theseus (see Episode 28 which was dedicated to this concept). I love using it when thinking about a hockey team:

- If you replace each member of a team, one by one over a long period of time, is it the same team at the start as it is at the end?
- What elements of the team persist through those changes: The team culture, style of play, history, the uniform, logo, the team's history?
- Example: I had to leave a team for a few seasons after the birth of our second child. I came back around a year later. While the team felt familiar, but also different: New faces, the team had a different energy, and played with a faster pace. Yet there was still that shared history, knowledge of teammates' tendencies, that made it easy to slide back into my rhythm.

## 2. The rink is a powerful relief valve

- During challenging & stressful times, going to the rink can be a relief.
  - For about two hours, it's just you & the boys. Real, honest, human connection.
  - No phones, e-mails, text messages, kids asking you for things.
  - It's a momentary relief from our endless to-do lists, responsibilities, and problems.
  - It can break up the patterns of your days & weeks: Something to look forward to.
  - Every game is unique, unpredictable, and unknown.
- Hockey forces you to be fully present: It's fast-paced, fully engages your body & mind, and comes with enough inherent danger that it forces focus.
- There's a flip side to this: Where some use a hockey game to work out their anger, frustrations, or psychosis on others.
  - This is where having a team can help. You have each other's backs, even if you don't fully understand or agree on their emotions, actions, or reasoning.
  - And sometimes that means pulling a teammate aside (or calling them out in the locker room) and asking if they're okay. Or at least reminding them that their behavior isn't cool. There's accountability.

- I think we need more relief valves like this in society.
  - Having to face your teammates & opponents in real life.
  - It's a way to combat the epidemic of loneliness
- A sports team is a great method to integrate yourself into a new community when you move. A way to set an anchor to steady yourself during a major life change. There's shared values, terminology, camaraderie. And a whole team of guys willing to help.

### 3. Parking lot beers

- How your squad interacts in the locker room is just as important (probably even more so) than how they work together on the ice.
- A beer league team has no salaries, no contracts, no coach & general manager.
  - Each guy is paying their share of the team dues to play.
  - Sure you'll have your best players, and your worse, but on the ledger they're all equal.
- Guys come to the rink from a wide range of disciplines & economic situations.
  - Blue collar, white collar: Doesn't matter - on the ice your jerseys have the same color (usually)
  - A hockey team is a great way to expose yourself to a wider range of perspectives than you might get at work, or among friends & family.
    - I've played on a line with a millionaire and a burger flipper at the same time
    - Entrepreneurs share the bench with welders, accountants, sales professionals, teachers, college dropouts, delivery guys, radiologists, etc...
    - Across a hockey team, you're guaranteed to get a wide range of views on current events, politics, relationships, raising kids, professional sports. It's valuable perspective taking.

- A hockey team also comes with built-in networking.
  - I've played regularly with teammates who became my accountant, my HVAC guy, my financial planner, a local beer distributor, the guy who I refinanced my mortgage with, and the guy who handled the title insurance on that transaction!
  - I know a lot of guys who know other people - giving me access to a powerful second-level network if/when I need it.
- And there's always the group chat - which can be a good for a few laughs during the week. And occasionally an annoyance of nonsense.

## 4. The scouts have all gone home

- When I say 'all roads lead to beer league' I mean it.
  - Some players' roads came from high competitive levels: Minor leagues, elite colleges, junior programs.
  - At the same time, some players don't pick up a stick until they're older: Working their way through adult learn-to-play programs, or coming back to the game they played as a kid.
  - Roads come from guys who are physical specimens, to those with kegs for bellies rather than six-packs.
- There's often significant age gaps -
  - The most extreme example of this was from a team I used to play on: One of our solid, veteran wingers well in his 70's complained about how our team's youngest member was missing the game because he had to attend his girlfriends' sweet sixteen party.
  - I love it when a veteran player of older years just plain outworks a kid in their early twenties. Old Man Strength is a thing.
  - I think teams like this are great, because they often offer younger guys some male mentorship. Whether overt or by example, it's valuable to be exposed to the mannerisms, thought processes, leadership, and friendship of older & more experienced men.

- But again I go back to the fact that a beer league hockey game is as close to meaningless as possible.
  - Often you have to remind young bucks that there's no scouts in the stands.
  - If you're a young hot-shot, it can be sobering to learn that nobody really cares that you dangled a bunch of guys who have kids as old as you are & dominated a mid-level house league game.
  - Beer league has a wonderful way to check people's egos.
  - And at the same time, those younger hot-shots can also motivate older guys to stay in shape, to work harder, to keep up & compete with that energy. And maybe even lay a punk out once in a while 🤔

## 5. The moments write themselves

- Over my lifetime, hockey has provided so much good in my life: Including ample amounts of creative inspiration
- My trilogy of sci-fi hockey books, [The Intergalactic Adventures of the Rainy River Bees](#), was my love letter to the game that gave me so much.
  - It was inspired by one of my real-life hockey teams, featured fictionalized moments from actual beer league memories, and captured many of my thoughts & emotions from playing the sport I've loved my entire life.
- Sports are a wonderful vehicle for stories: At the beer league level, we'll still share memories of guys who haven't played with us for years.
  - Beer league seasons tend to play out quicker: 3 or 4 in a calendar year. Ten to a dozen games, a quick playoffs, rinse & repeat.
  - Each season has a unique storyline, not unlike professional sports. Except nobody cares about that storyline except those playing in and running the league.
- Hockey also has a wonderful vernacular: Unique turns of phrase, words with different meanings,
  - Some examples for saying a goal was scored:
    - He fired the biscuit into the top shelf.

- Dangled forehand, backhand and tucked it five-hole.
  - Twisted wrist over the tandy's glove and hit top corns.
  - Went bar-down with a clapper from the high slot.
- As I discussed in my third point: The team provides valuable insight into different personalities & perspectives - which are gold to a creative person. I'm always taking qualities I admire (or despise) and injecting them into characters in my stories. I've even occasionally modeled characters after specific teammates.
  - I find a night playing hockey with the boys can be a great reset for my mind. A way of refilling creative energy.

### Episode 60 Quote:

Today's quote is an interesting philosophical thoughts, which comes from arguably the greatest hockey book ever written: Ken Dryden's [The Game](#) - Crafted by a legendary goaltender-turned-politician who played for the storied Montreal Canadiens.

*"When you are a presence, there are many things you need not do, for it is simply understood you can do them. So you don't do them. You don't risk what you need not risk, you let others' imaginations do them for you, for they do them better than you can. Like the man who opens his mouth to prove he's a fool, often the more you do, the more you look like everyone else."*