

# Foul Play

By Ron Bauman

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The air was fresh. Too fresh, like the grass was cut in the last 24-hours. The extracted blades stuck to the shoes of players running around the field, as they shouted, “pass it to me” and “watch out for that flying ball.” Being outside was not in my comfort zone but I was persuaded by my mother to sign up for a sport (had my father tried, he would’ve left the room with hands in the air, in defeat). The year is 1996 and I was playing outdoor soccer.

Back in ‘93, I was deemed a “lazy kid” by my second-grade teacher, Ms. Adams, after she had us present the activities, we like outside of school. Daniel said hockey (typical popular jock), Stephanie said horseback riding (Stephanie had the same hairstyle - a long braid - and palomino hair colour as her American Quarter horse, Ranch). Bradley said he was a Beaver, but he was missing his front two teeth, so I believed this to be a lie. At least I was honest by saying I loved watching television.

My parents had arranged our basement to have a beautiful home theatre set-up, with a 27-inch Zenith and over 50 channels connecting me to life at Bayside High or escaping to visit the intestinal organs on a magical school bus. It was the built-in babysitter needed for a family of six. However, both my parents were athletes, continuously engaging in softball, and were raising two, maybe three, other athletes in my siblings. So rather than recognizing we possessed different skills, they pushed for me out the front door. So just three years later, I would be put into the local soccer club.

I looked at soccer with trepidation, not wanting to injure myself through an aggressive encounter with an opposing player. I learned quickly that my team was quite good, so in a defense position, I was not required to stand as much. I could pick dandelions with my other defensemen, Kion and Lukey.

During one match, I fiddled with a loose tooth. I wanted it gone so I could buy some blank tapes to record my shows with the tooth fairy’s reimbursement. I sat, watching the forwards and midfield keep the other team’s defense busy. Then a dog barked, and I looked over to see if my dad had brought Brody, our black lab/sheepdog mix. It was not them, sadly.

“Ron, look out,” screamed my coach.

I turned my head and SLAM! The ball hit me right on the chin, knocking me onto my back and head into the pile of grass I racked up with my fingers. My coach came over with a rag and whipped blood away from my mouth. I sat up and felt with my tongue that my tooth is gone! But it was not in my hand or rattling around in my mouth. It must have landed on the ground. My teammates joined me in looking for the tooth, recognizing its value. Eric, our goalie, used his Coke-bottle glasses to locate it just next to my foot. I pocketed my tooth and got back on the field, with my chin stained red and my mind on my new fortune arriving that night.

The rest of the season was similarly as productive, with me sitting on the pitch watching my teammates do well. When they scored, I was up and cheering, running off to get a sip of water and hoping the orange slices were ready. When I was off the field, I would entertain my fellow sideliners with cartwheels and small games, serving snacks or keeping our bench tidy. My teammates mostly looked on and joined in, with some scoffing at the lack of seriousness I took to the game.

We finished the season in a place I cannot recall - all I know is we did not get a championship trophy. But I would walk away with a piece of hardware, at the season-end party. I was awarded with Most Improved Player “for making the game fun.”. It felt like an honour at first, but then five other teammates also received an M.I.P. award and the win felt as fake as the gold statue itself.

A week after the season was done, I came home with my new set of blank VHS tapes. My parents signed me up for babysitting classes in the Fall, hoping to offset the cost of a child-minder while they took one, maybe two, of my siblings to their athletic events during the week. When I slid my bag of tapes, they slid hard into the wall, rattling the shelf above. My mom hollered at me “dinner,” with me turning towards the door just as my fake plastic trophy hit me on the head then bounced onto the floor, cracking in half on its landing.

Score.