

Coach: Long-lasting friendships formed

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Bridlemile school. The field there was level, surrounded by undulating terrain. It promised a challenge to condition training.

We scheduled two practices per week for the next three weeks before league games started. The practice sessions were split into 20- to 30-minute segments. The first 20 minutes the boys spent running around the perimeter of Hamilton Park. It was a grueling workout for all of them. The site at that time was a rolling sidehill. Tom was not in physical condition to even run part of a lap with the boys. I ran about a quarter lap to set a pace and push for acceleration when they slowed down.

In 2016 one of the original team, now in his 50s, stopped me in the Multnomah Athletic Club lobby to say hello and reminded me of the dictatorial and tyrannical workouts at Bridlemile.

The second segment covered fielding. Throwing the ball between partners with gradually increasing separation resulted in an amazing increase in accuracy and distance.

In the third segment of practice the team played a simulated game after separating the boys into a fielding team and a batting team.

Not all the boys were sufficiently interested to participate even mentally. One, Brad, stood out in his apathy, low skills and disinterest. Tom and I were frustrated. We decided that regardless of skills each team member was going to play at least three innings per game. Tom's and my objectives were not about winning but to develop team spirit and skills in a sport. We decided that Brad and one or two others were going to be playing in the outfield.

The season started. It was a nine-game schedule, one game per week. We went into the ninth game with an eight-game loss

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record. Our pitching and infield game was acceptable and competitive. But any ball hit by the opposing team beyond the four infielders might as well be counted as a run. The skill level of our outfielders was very low. Nor did they pay attention to the flow of the game. While they did not fully fall asleep standing up, their attention was not on the game. Players of the team not in the game had adopted the routine of calling loudly the individual outfielder's name in whose direction a hit by any opponent was flying. That at least woke up the player.

He still had to find the ball and get it to the infield. A difficult task for the outfielders.

The boys on the sidelines enjoyed soft drinks and snacks during games. They were happy. No complaints from the parents. Tom and I were the spirit leaders for the team, leading them with cheers.

The physical condition of the boys improved faster than their playing skills. We lost the

first eight games by spectacular margins.

Our final game of the season, our ninth, started out better than the previous eight. We were ahead by one run when the opponents started the bottom half of the ninth inning. Our pitcher threw out one batter, allowed one almost base hit, with the runner being thrown out at second base. We might get a win if we could get one more out. I am sure that this thought entered everybody's mind. Our pitcher had to perform. We hoped.

Our pitcher threw a strike with the first pitch. The second pitch was in the center of the plate. The batter hit it sweetly and long toward the right outfield, Brad's position. Tom and I knew the game was over. Home run. Nine losses.

The sideline team shouted in fullest voice "Brad, Brad!" That woke up Brad. His name had been called. In a reflex reaction he stuck up his gloved left arm. The long fly ball found its way home into Brad's glove. It stuck. It must have felt comfortable there. It did not fall out.

We could not believe it. The team cheered. A win! Happiness. Tom and I cheered with the boys.

Then we looked at one another and laughed. The boys jumped in excitement. They felt the "winning season." They now were a team. Of friends. Brad was their hero.

The next year everybody, including Brad, signed up for the team. We did not win a single game that year. It did not matter. The friendships and bonds had been formed. Brad's catch made him a hero and the glue. And some of the friendships have lasted the next 50 years.

This essay was produced through a class taught by Tom Hallman Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter at The Oregonian.

Ballgame: Trips are a time to catch up

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best Italian food we'd had in years. While waiting, outside, a sudden torrential downpour started, and I ran into a nearby store and bought a gigantic umbrella that I still have. After dinner we crossed the street to partake in a cannoli at Mike's.

In Chicago we went to Oak Park to tour the Frank Lloyd Wright homes and had the ice cream trolley come to our hotel room. That's also the trip I was introduced to Garrett popcorn. In Pittsburgh we had sandwiches from Primanti's with fries tucked inside and became loyal fans of the burnt almond cake from Prantl's. We also had brats and pierogies. And while in Wisconsin, we ate plenty of cheese, including deep fried curds and cheddar beer soup.

Our last trip was to Milwaukee to see the Brewers play. Some might say that's an odd choice particularly since we haven't been to see a home game for the Dodgers, Yankees or Phillies (yet). It was more of a sentimental trip. Our grandfather was born in Monroe, Wisconsin, and neither Peter or I had ever been to the state.

It was far more charming than we thought it would be, particularly Monroe. The town, especially the older part, was almost untouched. We were able to envision our grandfather walking the same streets between 1893 and 1912 when he lived there.

The house our grandfather lived in is still standing. We talked briefly to the man who lives in the house today. He was nonplussed by us and had no interest in the history of the house, including the sign in the front lawn with its designation as the Twining House. Peter and I couldn't imagine having no interest in finding out more

about the person that the house was named after. A family name that adorned local parks, amphitheaters and schools among other things. Our great uncles were mucky mucks in the military and this small town had run with it. There is a lot of information that is easily found online, and history, military and even alien buffs would be interested.

We broke tradition once, but it didn't count as one of the baseball trips. At least in our books. Our father, at 91, had never been to a major league game, so we planned a trip to see the Mariners. We invited our oldest brother, partners, children. Six of us ended up going. Our dad's review of the game? "It wasn't very peppy." This, after he had gotten a ball fouled off to his seat. At his very first game. He didn't understand that this was a cool thing and didn't come around until he got back home, and his friends started telling him what a special thing that was to have happened.

Peter and I are looking forward to resuming our trips once we feel it's safer to travel and be in large crowds again. We've contemplated inviting others on our forays, but we honestly don't want to do so. We know that it wouldn't be the same, that a different dynamic would ensue. And once you open that Pandora's box, it simply can't be closed. There's an ease and a shorthand that's involved when it's the two of us. There's no jealousy or hurt feelings or someone insisting upon having alone time. These trips are a time for us to catch up, relax, explore and eat to our heart's content.

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: STORE CHAIN HAVING OLD, INEXPENSIVE CLOTHES FOR PEOPLE STANDING OVER SIX FEET: TALLER GENERAL.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals O

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D K J Q K J Q K D Q K J Q .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DURING THE INFOMERCIAL FOR BATHROOM FLOORING, THE HOST SHOUTED "DON'T TOUCH THAT TILE!"
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