



In the Golden Fall Days

Marina Ridley, Colonel By Secondary School

ABSTRACT

The author examines the role that high school physical activities have played in shaping her as person and, ultimately, as a leader. She provides insights on not just her passion and dedication for sports, but also on a sense of accomplishment, a desire to learn, inspiration, teamwork and the joy of mentoring younger student athletes—all invaluable building blocks for leadership.

At fourteen, going into a new school, you have no idea who you will come out as four years later. When I started in grade nine at Colonel By Secondary School, an impressive and renowned local Ottawa high school, I was intimidated, nervous, anxious and excited. The school, known as Ottawa's International Baccalaureate (IB) School, attracts students from all around the city—gifted, talented, high achieving students. I was coming to Colonel By, not as an IB student but as a grade nine academic student, a serious student but one who had many other interests outside of the classroom. Among my many courses, grade nine physical education (P.E.) class was one of my favourites. I could run around, make new friends and play games. It is kind of ironic that the one class that brought out the child in me was the same class that ultimately began making me into the person I am today.

My P.E. teacher, Mrs. Broadhurst, encouraged me to play on the field hockey team that year. Throughout middle school, I had played on the basketball team, but I was never passionate about it. When playing field hockey in P.E. class with Mrs. Broadhurst, I felt as if this was my jumping point—this was what would start my high school sport career—and it did. I, and only one other grade nine girl, made the team

that year. We were told that grade nines rarely made the “senior” team, so this was a great accomplishment. Already, girls on the tier two team looked up to us for our accomplishments. Michelle (the other girl) and I quickly grew to love the game. In the golden fall days, we played after school, and became involved in local tournaments. Our team traveled to Toronto every fall to play in the Toronto School Girls Tournament, an autumn escape from the classroom and two days of challenging field hockey. As a team, we connected, and as individuals we learned about dedication. The Toronto tournament exposed me to highly competitive teams, and made me realize that if I really wanted to stand out on my team, if I really wanted to excel in this game, I would have to be a leader. By the time grade eleven rolled around, Michelle and I were the most senior players on the team and good friends. At this point we were co-captains of this varsity team and we really looked forward to our final season together. Not only were we having a great time, playing a game we loved, but we were also leaders.

Personally, I loved demonstrating stickhandling and teaching and coaching the plays to the younger girls. Michelle and I coordinated the traveling from practices to games; we led the warm-ups, began the 7 a.m. practices, cheered on the team, encouraged the girls, observed our coach, helped her, and assumed more and more responsibility. We grew; I grew.

In the middle of my growing field hockey interests, our devoted coach, Mrs. Broadhurst, was diagnosed with breast cancer. Always keeping a positive outlook, she inspired all the field hockey girls to keep reaching for goals that we did not realize were within our grasp. As a team, we put together some small gifts to try and help our coach through her ordeal; she stayed strong by continuing to be herself through her coaching, by being a teacher and being a mom. As players (all of us) learned from her what it meant to be a leader; a leader is someone who can put aside his or her own personal feelings and experiences to help other people learn about themselves. Mrs. Broadhurst taught me that being a positive role model on a consolation team is just as rewarding as being part of a championship team.

Volleyball was another activity that commanded my high school years. From grade nine, I played on both the junior and senior volleyball teams. Being a year older than students in my grade forced me to play a year ahead. Because of this age difference I was compelled to play on the senior team for three years instead of two. At the time I felt like I was missing out; it seemed that my age always worked against me, making me the novice among the seniors. Often the junior “on the bench,” I felt that I was a member of a team that would only hinder my volleyball career, instead of

advancing it. Looking back on the experience today, I realize that being a three-year senior had its own benefits: I watched and listened; I soaked up every speech, encouraged by tips and pointers, and tried to pinpoint how I could improve. All these things eventually made me a better leader. In my grade twelve year, for the second time, I was named captain of a team—but this time I did not feel as confident as I had with field hockey. With field hockey I had the command of the game to justify being captain, but with volleyball I felt much more inexperienced. By the time the volleyball season was over, I learned what it truly meant to be a leader: I realized that it does not mean being an all star—it means displaying that all-star attitude. I learned that being a leader means encouraging others and oneself, displaying a positive attitude, and always listening to coaches for improvement.

In addition to extracurricular activities I learned much about leadership in sports from my grade eleven P.E. class; I was just as excited about P.E. in grade eleven as I had been in grade nine. The big difference between grade nine and grade eleven was the fact that everyone was there by choice; P.E. is an optional course and those who chose the course wanted to excel, stay fit, and have fun all in one seventy-five minute period. The course challenged our skills because we could teach a lesson on a sport of our choice; not surprisingly, I gave field hockey lessons. Playing with friends in P.E. class was another way to connect with people, and have a really have a great time. At the end of eleventh grade I received the Physical Education Award for grade eleven girls, and at the same time I finished one of my favourite high school classes.

When it comes to high school, it really is what you make of it. If you are a person who likes to stay active, develop time management skills, stay fit, make friends, and learn how to appreciate games you played as a child, sports will be a positive experience. I entered the P.E. program at Colonel By in 2004 a somewhat anxious participant, and in June 2008 I like to think I will leave my school as one of the athletic leaders. And along the way I discovered a side of myself I did not even know I had.



Marina Ridley is in her final year at Colonel By Secondary School in Ottawa, Canada. She will begin studies in Public Administration at Carleton University in the fall. She enjoys reading and sports, in particular volleyball, touch football and field hockey.