



I was no sportswoman, but as a single mom, I owed it to my son to learn to love baseball

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Contributed to The Globe and Mail

Published Sunday, May 22, 2016 12:00PM EDT

Last updated Sunday, May 22, 2016 12:00PM EDT

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I didn't play baseball, except for that one season during university when friends begged me to join their team. Co-ed teams had to have at least three female players and I was a "free agent." I'm sure they regretted recruiting me; I couldn't catch, I couldn't throw, and the standard chorus when I got up to bat was, "Heavy hitter, move in."

I didn't give baseball another thought until years later, when my four-year-old joined a T-ball team. Putting on his uniform for the first time, he had said in awe, "I can't believe I get to wear these clothes!"

His enthusiasm was infectious, and I began to understand the appeal of team sports – the sense of belonging, the camaraderie and how excitement multiplied when shared.

For the next 15 years, baseball was a welcome social event for the two of us. While my son chatted with his teammates in the dugout, I caught up with the parents on the bleachers. We both looked forward to the mid-season barbecues and the wind-up parties.

Parents were expected to sign up for supporting roles, and the usual choices were coach, manager, scorekeeper or selling snacks from the concession. Coaching was out of the question; as a one-season player, I knew nothing. Ordering uniforms, chasing down parents for money and all the other team manager tasks seemed like a headache. I told myself that if no one else stepped up, I would do it, and, thankfully, I only had to once.

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I noticed that not many parents volunteered to keep score. I am an accountant, and I figured, how hard could it be? Well, more challenging than I expected. In the midst of the action, you couldn't look away for an instant. Was the throw from third to the shortstop or to the second baseman on that double play? And forget about washroom breaks unless there was a pitching change. But from the intense focus that scorekeeping required, I learned to appreciate the finer points of the game.

After discovering mobile baseball apps such as GameChanger and iScore, I became the team statistician. The reams of stats I could produce – ERA, RBI, OPS and a hundred more I'd never heard of – seemed impressive, but when a coach asked me about one of them, I had to admit, “I just put the data in, the app does all the rest.”



Jori Bolton for The Globe and Mail

By volunteering to keep score, I could usually avoid helping at the concession stand. It was difficult to see the game from there, and as a single parent who was often the only one in my son's personal cheering section, I didn't want to deprive him of that. Besides, I'm not a fan of concession food – hot dogs, burgers, Freezies, chocolate bars, chips. I packed a cooler with healthier fare from home. As a compromise, I'd let my son have a 50-cent candy bag after the game.

We lived for a year in Denver, a baseball mecca. With AAA teams allowed to recruit players from all over the county, I wasn't sure how to go about finding my son a team. The manager of the indoor baseball centre suggested an ad on their bulletin board. My son and I wrote it together:

“Eleven-year-old looking for an AAA team, can pitch, play shortstop or any position as needed, runs fast, mother can scorekeep.”

We got three offers. With advice from agent Mom, my son chose a team that, although it wasn't the strongest of the three, offered the most opportunity to develop as a pitcher. The friendliness of the players and other parents helped make Denver a great experience. Living in a city with a Major League Baseball team in the year they made it to the World Series was a bonus.

Baseball also gave me a chance to develop as a writer. I began writing stories for local newspapers, celebrating our team's successes. With my son as technical editor, they were real baseball stories. However, my objective, perhaps different from other sports writers' jobs, was to get every player's name in the newspaper. Tournaments provided the best material; almost everyone had a moment, and rarely did I have to resort to, “Also on the team was ...”

There were challenges, such as getting grass and mud stains out of white baseball pants. I always hoped he wouldn't have to slide too early in the game. And there were tough moments: finding the right words to say on those quiet drives home when my son felt he hadn't pitched his best; and a heartbreaking loss by one run in the final of the provincial championship.

I enjoyed watching my son grow as a baseball player – his composure on the mound, his increasing batting average – and as a leader, stepping up to say a few words to the team before an important game.

My son's been gone two seasons now, at university in another province. Yes, I miss baseball. But most of all, I miss the special moments that I shared with him because of it.

But life goes on, and I'm making new baseball memories: drinking beer with sushi at Vancouver Canadians games with girlfriends; watching my 12-year-old nephew carry on the family baseball dynasty. And I watched the Blue Jays' run at the playoffs last year with a man who didn't know the first thing about baseball – until he met me.

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