

Slap Shot!

Three Hockey Stories

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The Rink Rats © 2010 by Irene Punt.

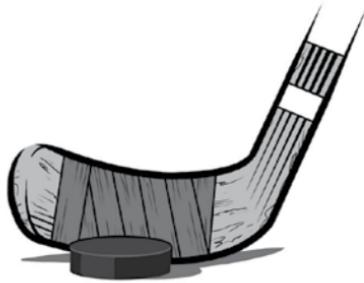
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Team Players

Centennial Arena. Four thirty. Novice tryouts.

Tom stood by the spectator glass watching Group B battle for the puck in a fast-moving game. Jordan was in goal. Mark was right wing. They were on opposing teams — red pinnies versus green pinnies.

Mark caught a pass from his green defenceman. He guided the puck along the boards then crossed the ice. He passed to his centre.



Jordan skated forward, shifting his stick to a blocking position. He made his ugly goalie face with his eyes glued to the puck. “Grrmph!”

THWAP! Jordan stopped the first shot. Mark caught the rebound and circled back, gaining control. *THWAP!* Mark’s shot was crisp. But Jordan stopped the puck again, this time with his glove. The puck slid to Jordan’s red defenceman. He passed it to open ice.

Bad play on defence, thought Tom.

Mark raced for the puck, picked it up on the end of his stick and took a giant slapshot. *PING!* The puck soared over Jordan’s shoulder . . . into the net!

“Yahoo!” Mark cheered, holding his stick above his head.





“Way to go, Mark!” shouted Tom.

“Way to go, Mark!” echoed Harty. “You are awesome! Hang in there, Jordan! You rock!”

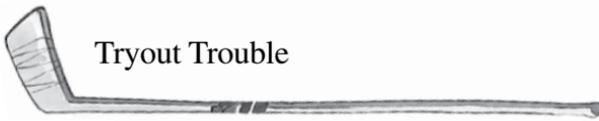
Mark and Jordan looked over and smiled.

Oh, boy. Here we go again! thought Tom.

It had been another long day at school with Harty stealing his friends. Harty burped the longest burp with Mark. Harty drew the scariest picture with Jordan. Harty got the blackest bruise with Stuart. And Harty won the Day Three three-letter-word competition with Kylie. Tom shook his head. *Will this guy ever stop?*

“Hey, Tom,” Harty whispered. “Are you ready for Goop A? Er . . . I mean Group A?”

Tom ignored him. He watched more hockey.



Tryout Trouble

Harty shrugged and frowned. “I really miss my old friends and Bulldogs. My life *was* easy peasy, and now everything is new.” He took a deep breath. “Including Mark, Jordan and Stuart.”

Tom was not ready to speak.

Harty pushed on. “Thanks for sharing all your friends with me. I was super freaked out about moving to Chinook Park. But you made it easy for me.”

Harty tapped his

stick. “Mr. Watson was right.”

After the longest silence ever, Tom raised an eyebrow and asked, “What did Mr. Watson say?”





“That you guys are the best. That you have more fun than a barrel of monkeys. That you look after each other,” said Harty. “You are team players through and through.”

Tom blushed. Mr. Watson’s words had stung. *Being a team player is the most important thing. It means being unselfish, sharing, trying your best. Oh, boy.* Tom felt guilty. He had not been the best to Harty just now. *Why is sharing your best friends so difficult?*

Harty continued, “Mr. Watson also said that I am to share all the old hockey stuff he left in the garage. He gave me a heads-up on what you guys would like: pads for Stuart, NHL stuff for Jordan, funny videos for Mark. Next time you get a drive over, you get the



slush drink machine. Mr. Watson said that you would know exactly what to do with it.”

“Whoa! Me? I get my own slush machine!” exclaimed Tom. “Mr. Watson is so cool, he’s frozen!”

Tom looked at Harty, who had tried his best — all week, in every way. “I’m glad you moved to Chinook Park. You are like a new cookie. Different, but good.”

“Huh?” Harty laughed.

Tom crossed his arms into an X and they clapped a high-ten.



Group A

Soon the arena was buzzing with more players. Tom didn't recognize anyone.

"I'm so nervous for the Group A evaluation. What about you?" whispered Harty.

"Me, too," said Tom, his stomach knotted. "It's scary."

"Do you think we could both be centres on the same team?" asked Harty.

Tom thought about it. There is only one centre per line. But every team has three



lines. It *would* be nice to have Harty on his team. “Anything is possible,” said Tom. Suddenly he felt better thinking they’d be together.

“Hi, guys!” It was Coach Howie. He was holding a large case of Lucky Lemon Guzzle. “Here, take one of these drinks for after your evaluation. Now you’d better get going. Suit up for Group A!” Coach Howie looked proud as he patted them on their backs.

“What if we both make Team One?” asked Harty.

“Ahh!” gasped Tom, choking. He opened his drink and guzzled it back all at once.





Harty did the same thing. Then together they let out the biggest *BURRRP!*



At five o'clock the new evaluators studied Group A. They were on the lookout for forehand, backhand, tape-to-tape passes, position, puck control, speed, strength, endurance, attitude, effort and sportsmanship.

At 5:30 everyone stopped for a water break. Tom finished off his water bottle and got it refilled. So did Harty.

“Whoa! Holy smokes,” Tom told Harty. “Group A is way faster than Group B. Everything is electric! The passes, skating, plays, coaches’ calls . . .”



Tryout Trouble

“I sure don’t feel like the fastest skater any more!” admitted Harty. “But I am pushing myself hard.”

“Me, too,” said Tom. He took another gulp of water.

They headed to the bench, ready to play a fifteen-minute game. Purple pinnies against white pinnies. Tom and Harty wore purple ones.

On Tom’s first shift, he missed the faceoff.

On the second shift, Tom won the faceoff. He slapped the puck back to the defenceman and charged for the blue line. *OH, NO! He shouldn’t be there!* The puck was turned over to the white pinnies. Their left winger passed to his centre. The centre barrelled down the ice in a



breakaway, took a shot, SCORED!

Back on the bench, the coach said, “Tom and Harty, next shift I’m going to put you guys together, as wingers. Tom left wing. Harty right wing.”

“Okay,” they said.

“Weird,” whispered Tom.

On the third shift, Tom and Harty filed onto the ice. Tom grabbed the puck. He faked left and went right for a perfect deke. Tom looked to Harty for a pass. Harty’s head was out of position. One shoulder was dropped. He was slightly bent over and his knees were knocking together. A white pinny was closing in on Tom. Tom passed to his defenceman. The puck came back to Tom.



Suddenly Tom realized what was wrong with Harty. He had to go pee! Tom skated back down the ice and . . . oh, no . . . it hit him. Tom had to go, too! Youch! He couldn't balance and his knees started knocking together. His skating went from long, smooth strides to little baby steps with his heels.





His crossovers were over.

Harty was now in worse shape. His face purpled, just like his pinny.

Together they got out of the play and off the ice.



Back in the dressing room, Tom sat on the bench like a deflated balloon. Noise and laughter circled around him.

“I guess we are the Purple Pee Guys,” Harty whispered with a crooked smile.

Tom brightened. “A couple of big bloopers,” he whispered back. “Drinking that Lucky Lemon Guzzle before our evaluation was *bad* luck!”

They both laughed.



“We will never forget today,” they said together. “Jinx!”

Coach Alex entered the dressing room. “Hi, guys!” he said, quieting the room. “You have one more evaluation and then you are on your team! Check your email! Now, go home and get rested up.” He set down a case of Lucky Lemon Guzzle by the door. “Grab a refreshment on your way out! Courtesy of Coach Howie!”



When Tom reached the long hallway, he spied Stuart, dressed and ready for the Group C evaluation. His face was covered in blotches and he was wearing enormous shoulder pads.



“You look like serious defence!” complimented Tom.

“Thanks!” Stuart beamed. “And those NHL Band-Aids make my feet feel great. I’m ready! Bring it on!”

“Yeah! Good luck out there!” Tom and Harty told him. They swigged back their drinks.

“Thanks,” said Stuart. He frowned. “Lucky you guys. You got a drink! It took me so long to get my gear and Band-Aids on, I missed out! It’s not fair. Everyone in Group C guzzled a Guzzle, but me!”

“Whoops,” said Harty. “You might be the lucky one. I have a feeling that you are going to ace this evaluation!”

Tom looked up into the stands where



the evaluators were taking notes. *I wonder which team or teams we will all end up on.*

“Hey, Stu . . . just try your best!” Tom said.