

I'm one of the many coaches of the Diamonds hockey team, and since everyone here knew John, suffice to say, everyone should know about his Diamonds. I refer to the team as his Diamonds, as they were truly an extension of John. When the 10th Anniversary of the team was approaching a few years back, a proposal was made at a Civitan meeting to change the name from its original Don Mills Diamonds to its present name. The motion was instantly unanimous, however the debate continued over the addition of one extra letter – should it be Donaldson or Donaldson's with the 's. Everyone tried to think of other examples with the 's and realized that that wasn't the standard naming tradition. The 's – makes the subject matter a possessive, and there was no doubt, that the Diamonds are John's team.

This is Saturday afternoon – hockey time for the Diamonds, the second of our two teams will just now be packing up their bags following another great day on the ice. When this week's opposition called to pass on his condolences, and inquire about proceeding with today's games, there wasn't much for consideration, as one of John's joys was seeing his kids on the ice. The Diamonds were the priority. Yes, today's games would proceed as planned. On Saturday's John was ever present around the arena greeting everyone who entered and always ready to proudly speak, or show a visitor the players on ice, highlighting their many individual accomplishments.

Even before the Diamonds existed John promoted the concept of Special Hockey around the city, as reflected by the many messages and memories received this week from other organizers around the league who experienced John's commitment to the special hockey program.

John knew this was more than a hockey team he was building. It wasn't just about a team continuing to operate after the baton had been passed on. I don't recall John ever providing a single suggestion on how to perform drills or on-ice strategy, in fact as I reflected over this past week about our past conversations, I don't think we ever even spoke about hockey. We talked about the team, we talked about the opportunities for the players – hockey was just the delivery mechanism, the by-product of something much bigger. Even though his Diamond's jacket did read 'Executive', it should have read 'Mentor', as he was by all definitions a true mentor. A mentor to all of the Diamond coaches, and he did so with his unique style of persistence and light-hearted humour.

John will be remembered by much more than a name on a sweater. That's because what John has built is much greater than a mere memory, he has created an attitude, he has built a culture, he has instilled in the Diamond's the true spirit of the special needs hockey concept – promoting participation at all levels and abilities, inclusion of everyone who wants to play the game of hockey, and performing at one's individual best. Anyone can experience his philosophy when you hear the excitement in the dressing room, when you see the player's expressions as they come off the ice onto their bench, and when you experience a crowd cheering for both teams – you know something special is happening.

John will be more than a memory, as we will continue to live by a code that John embraced.