

FROZEN BALLS

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As another Christmas dawns, I can't help but think back to my youth. Seven long years ago I asked for hockey equipment as my Christmas gift. I wanted a stick, goalie pads, a mask and two nets. If I received these items, I would be set for the street hockey game in the afternoon. All of my friends were also asking for street hockey gear. Brad was looking for goalie gear too as he was going to be in the other net; Tyler was looking for a couple of sticks including an Easton Aluminum which he would use for ice hockey too.

Of course, we all asked for tennis balls. We would always lose one a day, it didn't matter if there was snow or not. Brad and I refused to go in the nets unless we used them. This annoyed most of the guys because the balls bounced too much on the pavement making it difficult to get a good shot on a one-timer. I knew it was a problem, but I wasn't prepared to defeat my likelihood of having children by using one of those hard plastic orange balls. I may have been thirteen at the time but I was still preparing for the future.

As Christmas Day drew closer our anticipation grew. Since the snow and ice had covered the driveway where we had taken broken pieces of asphalt to use as net posts we had to use chunks of ice. They had to be replaced after every short game because cars would keep running over them.

I couldn't wait to get a new pair of goalie pads. My knees were so bruised and beaten they looked as if someone had taken a bat to them. I really needed a mask more than anything else though. A person wouldn't think a tennis ball could do much damage to a coming off the blade of a twelve or thirteen-year-old. Well it can when it's frozen and being shot hard from fifteen feet away. I got hit in the mouth, the nose, the eye, and the *balls* so many times that week leading up to Christmas that I would go home at night and get down on my hands and knees to pray for new gear. The guys realized that I was starting to hurt and they started to take it easy on me for the most part. I began to rack up the shutouts but it

did get pretty boring only stopping light shots.

When school was finally out, we began to play earlier in the day, sometimes going from the morning to darkness without stop. When the games would go long, we would get into fights in the snowbank. This is usually when the boys were separated from the teens. Being one of the heaviest guys there, I didn't lose too many rumbles in the snow.

Finally Christmas Eve had arrived. We had a short game that day. A lot of us had to go see the grandparents or relatives early in the afternoon or evening which is a good thing because you would get presents at all of the stops. The next day I was very excited when I looked under the tree and saw two boxes each containing a street hockey net. I couldn't wait to try them out. Unfortunately "Santa" had not put them together and would not do so for another week.

We didn't start using the nets until mid-January which didn't seem to bother the guys. I also received a new goalie stick blade and a Montreal Canadiens hockey jersey with R-O-Y and #33 on the back. In my stocking I found some tennis balls which would makeup for the ones we had lost the day before. I didn't get pads or a mask but I was okay with it all. The others received some nice stuff like a mask and some sticks but it wasn't anything better than what other people got.

I think many of us began to realize that we didn't need all of this fancy equipment to have a good game of street hockey. As we grew older and started working we bought our own gear, but for the most part it stayed the same. I eventually did buy a new mask and was able to find a different pair of pads to use in the net.

It's been over a year since our group of friends has gotten together and played a game of street hockey. Whenever I see the odd person, I say that we'll be having a game soon. When we get out there, it will be just like old times with asphalt posts and frozen balls.