

Messenger EDITORIAL

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Standing up for what is right

All of us who have kids in organized activities are hoping for the same things. We want the kids to be focused and we hope to keep them active. Most importantly, we hope they are learning life lessons along the way.

And when those values erode or fall by the wayside, we all shake our heads.

A situation like this happened recently in a local Nepean Eagles NCAFA midget football league, made up of players 16-18 years of age.

Simply put, an opposing club got caught doing something illegal. The coaches were speaking into microphones and had planted a communication device inside the quarterback's helmet. According to Football Canada, this is clearly against the rules. The team had informed NCAFA and the officials that they were using a communication device, but the understanding was that the communication would be between a coach up on a roof or in a press box to a coach on the sideline.

Complicating matters is the fact that teams from Quebec – the Ottawa area midgets play an interlocking schedule with Montreal teams – are allowed to use these devices.

The team in question, who had won their first five games, finally got caught with their devices after a game against the Eagles. The first inclination was a 'don't do it again' message, but the Eagles wanted something further. At a special meeting, the opposing coach received a one-game suspension, but they would not forfeit any of their wins.

Eagles coach Carlos Blizzard pursued the issue in the name of doing the right thing and setting an example.

"Football is not about wins and losses," he said. "It's 100 per cent about life lessons. What kind of life lessons are we teaching the kids if someone cheats on us and we don't stand up for ourselves?"

Blizzard is bang on correct. We want our kids to learn values through the sports and activities they are involved in. It doesn't matter if it's football, hockey, soccer, dance, gymnastics, cadets, music, or anything else. We want to instill two values through having our kids participate in activities. The first value is how to overcome obstacles and achieve goals. The second is self-improvement through the activity, which includes integrity.

Sadly, the two teams met again at TD Place last weekend and it was an embarrassing scene for minor football. A fight broke out in the stands between parents. The opposing team won the game handily, by a score of 64-14. However, with only seconds left, they called a time out to try to score again.

Predictably, the coaches got involved in a shoving match after the hand shake.

When the Eagles' season ends later this month, it will not matter how many games were won or lost. What will matter is the lesson in values they learned from their coach.

Youth sports needs more guys like Carlos Blizzard.

We all have our fears

Thanksgiving is out of the way, and it's time to start thinking about Halloween again.

After all, we just digested an insane amount of turkey, potatoes, gravy and sodium, so why not chase it a few weeks later with handfuls of mini Kit Kat bars?

I have never been scared of the monsters and the goblins at Halloween. But I have been scared of clowns.

One of my earliest Halloween memories was answering the door after I had been taken out trick or treating in a ghost costume, which consisted of a bed sheet thrown over me. My mother cut out eyes holes that didn't quite match where my eyes were, so I couldn't

see more than a foot or two ahead of myself all night.

When I got to the door, I saw a clown. I screamed. I mean, I let out a blood-curdling scream that probably sent crows flying off telephone wires half a continent away. I ran upstairs to my room, closed the door, grabbed my stuffed animal puppy, and had a panic attack in bed. The puppy had a key that you could wind to make it play music. I wound it all night. I was either three or four. It didn't matter. If it happened in my 20s, I still would have ended up in bed with my stuffed animal puppy.

My tradition now for Halloween is to wear my football referee's uniform and hide around the corner of the house. When trick or treaters approach, I come out from around the corner, blow the whistle, throw my flag in the air, and call penalties. It might be an "illegal formation" if they are not lined up properly. It may be "face masking" if they have a mask. It might be "holding" if they are holding hands with siblings. Sometimes, if two groups come at once, I line them up for a coin toss. The winning group can go to the door first, or they can defer and go second. They never defer.

And if there are clowns coming to the door, well, I can just stay around the corner and sit that one out while I practice breathing.

One thing the kids like to do is go to Saunders Farm and Watson's Mill and any other haunt they can go to.

Two years ago, we did exactly that. We all went to Saunders Farm and had a blast. Then a clown started chasing me in my maze and I threw my 13-year-old nephew at him and ran like hell. My nephew and the clown both thought it was hilarious. I might get to that point some day.

I decided to Google fear of clowns last week. I know people joke about being afraid of clowns. I am even afraid of people I know

who dress up in clowns, even when they aren't, as they say, "clowned up."

There is actually a word for this fear. It's called coulrophobia. Johnny Depp suffers from it, but I guess he is okay with pirates. When Daniel Radcliffe played Harry Potter he encountered Lord Voldemort and every supernatural and mythical being imaginable. But Daniel Radcliffe is terrified of clowns, too. Even P Diddy is afraid of clowns.

Had I known then what I just read, that he is a coulrophobe like me, we could have bonded.

In a UK tabloid article, Dr. Melanie Phelps

outlined six factors that can cause coulrophobia.

The first is how clowns are introduced to you as a child. We have a photo in our living room of my mom handing me to a clown when I was about two. In the photo, I am visibly terrified. The Diva loves that photo.

The second is individual differences. Some kids love the fun fair rides such as ghost train that surprise them and giggle about that and some just get scared.

The third is age of exposure. Some children may be too young to figure out what is really happening and it is not a real threat, they may have been okay if exposed when they were a little older.

The fourth is that they may see others afraid and they will follow suit.

The fifth is the general level of safety and security the child feels.

If the child might feel self-conscious or nervous, and at around the same time they are introduced to unknown distorted clown faces, they may be more prone to be scared or anxious.

And finally, children are more sensitive as their nervous systems develop. They are more sensitive to new smells, different tastes, and different visual or auditory stimuli. The clown's face and behaviour may just be too overwhelming for that child at that time.

Like any phobia, those that don't have it think it's odd. I am not afraid of heights, but I see many people freak out at Senators games if they are on the 400-level of the arena. Some people are afraid of spiders and snakes. Some are afraid of crowded places, others of wide open spaces. We all have our fears.

In the mean time, I will just stripe up and wait around the corner for you to come to my front door.

Mind you, when I am a referee, a lot of people who yell at me call me a clown, so I guess all is good.



FROM THE OTHER SIDE

by Jeff Morris

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