

Nathan Beaudoin

#23 St. Matthew Thunder



Nate The Great - One Year Anniversary

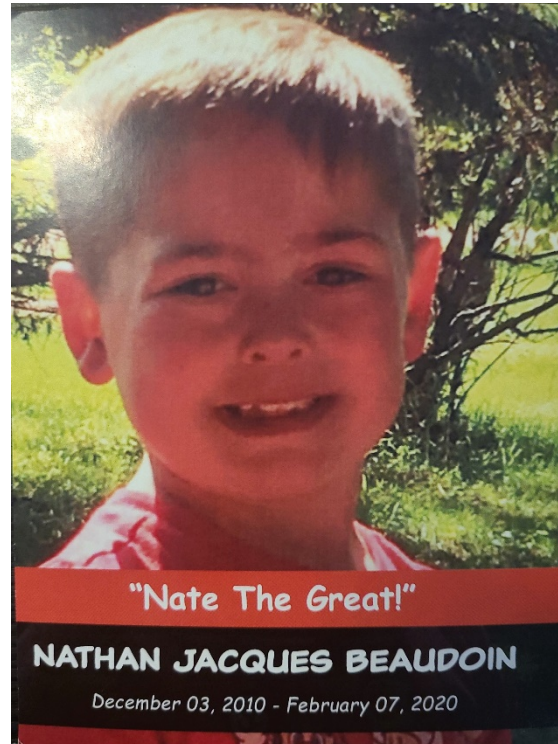
A year now has passed since we lost a rare gem, Nathan (Nate the Great) Beaudoin. As Nate's Head Coach, I have been asked to have the privilege of reflecting upon what Nate left us with, and perhaps some words of inspiration amidst these trying (COVID 19) times. I have included the speech I gave at Nate's funeral. It tells some of what we went through last year, as a background for those of you who may not have heard his story.

Last year, at this time, while we were all still playing hockey, Nate was in a battle for his life. It was a battle in which death took its toll on Nate's body, but for certain not his Spirit! Nate suffered from a rare condition known as Heterotaxy. His little heart was in need of repair, and the courage he showed was astonishing!

Nate left us with the life lesson of living life with courage. Don't let fear stop you from achieving your dreams. Nate's dream was to be a hockey player! He absolutely achieved that. I can only reflect upon the times that I went up to the hospital to visit Nate and his parents, Joey and Carrie. Seeing Nate in the condition he was in at the hospital, and reflecting on my own health, and the health of my children, truly makes a person feel grateful. Knowing that the other kids on our hockey team were healthy as can be and were able to just show up at the rink, in contrast to Nate's struggle in the hospital, truly makes a person feel grateful. It makes you appreciate the preciousness of life. Nate taught us to be grateful for so many reasons.

It was in seeing the community and hockey family rally around Nate in his last days with us that has truly left a lasting impression with me. From seeing players who wore Nate's helmet sticker, to seeing so many other clubs and teams come together in support of Nate, including tremendous support from St. Mathew Hockey, and its board of directors and families, was a real testament to how one person's courage can bring so many together. For this I am truly grateful.

Since Nate's passing, it has been an inspiration of mine to start a Hockey Tournament in honour of Nate! The name of the tournament would be 'Nate the Great Memorial Outdoor Classic'! Without the restrictions we are now facing, the first annual was to be held this weekend. The tournament's Championship game would be played on Sunday, February 7th, marking the 1-year anniversary of Nate's passing. The purpose of the tournament would be to bring awareness of Heterotaxy, but more importantly, would retell Nate's story and all the lessons learned from him. The lesson of inclusion and what it is to be part of a team, the lesson of how to care for another person, despite their talents on the



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ice, and perhaps most importantly the lesson of love and what that looks like in real time. The fire to start a tournament is still very strong in my heart.

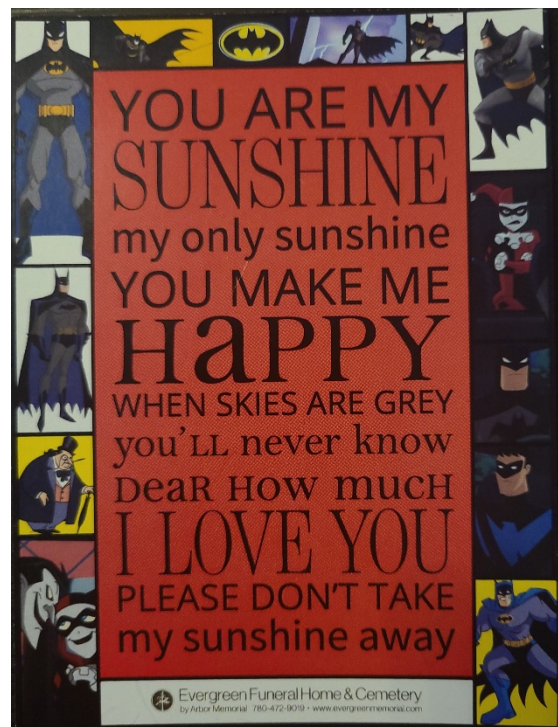


Last year in support of Nate and in preparation for this year's tournament we had several toques made up, with Nate's number 23 and the St. Matt's logo. Half the proceeds from these toques will go to St. Mathew Hockey. The other half of the proceeds will go to The Little Heart Heroes Fund, www.littleheartheroes.com. This charity has been selected by Joey and Carrie Beaudoin. The little heart heroes fund is a fund that was created in association with the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and is a registered Canadian charity. Heart heroes fund is a camp for medically fragile kids. Nate had the privilege of attending this camp in 2018. In order to purchase a toque (\$20/toque) feel free to contact my wife Kristina, via email, leeskristina@yahoo.ca.

Another little touch this tournament was to provide, all inspired by Nate, is a pizza party for the staff up at the Stollery's PC ICU. The hospital staffs including nurses and doctors are genuine heroes and all too often are not thanked enough. This year it is our goal to smuggle some pizza past the security and get it up to that staff, so that they can enjoy some Pizza on Nate's behalf. I can just picture him laughing and smiling about it now.

If I can leave you all with a couple thoughts to reflect upon it would be to take a moment to reflect upon your health. Be grateful that we are all still here. Sure, we haven't been able to play much hockey this year, but we still have the hope of playing in the future. I know that Nate would encourage us to not take anything for granted and to live and love like it's your last day, like it's your only day. Take joy in one another and support each other. The restrictions and the COVID will soon pass and we can be grateful that we are all still here, with the opportunity to play another day!

Nate, thank you for everything my boy. I will always be your coach. I will always try to be grateful. Because of your example I hope to never take anything for granted. When I show up at the rink to coach, even if it's for just one kid, I hope to treat those moments with honour, not knowing when that last skate might be... love you kiddo. Miss ya!



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Nate's Eulogy

Being Nate's Coach and what it Meant to Me

I would like to begin by first saying thank you to Joey and Carrie for the tremendous privilege and honour it is to speak here today. Thank you.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Mike Lees, many know me as 'Coach Mike'. I had the honour and privilege of being Nate's hockey coach this season. Although my time with Nate was limited, I genuinely feel humbled and inspired by who Nate is and what he has brought to our team. I am going to take a few minutes of your time, to share some of my journey as Nate's Coach and the ways in which he has inspired our year!

Nate joined our team back in the fall, joining us a couple of weeks after our season began. As a new joining member, Nate was immediately welcomed to our crew as a part of team Thunder. Nate joined our Novice team with the dream of playing hockey. He joined our team with the desire to do something, I'm sure many thought impossible, for a boy whose life had already defied so many odds.

I can recall Nate's very first skate quite clearly. I recall meeting Nate at the gates to the ice. Nate was geared up and ready to go. He was obviously having nerves about trying something new for the first time. I think he was maybe overwhelmed by the situation of being the new kid, along with doing something he wasn't familiar with. After a quick conversation with mom and dad, Nate mustered up the courage to put his fears aside, to live the dream of being a hockey player. Upon reflection, it is very inspiring to see the courage it took for Nate to take those first strides. Something we can all learn from. We should never let fear stop us from achieving our hearts' desires. In this case, a boy simply wanted to be a hockey player, to be part of a team. Nate achieved this goal, which is truly inspiring.

Well, it was evident to us coaches that Nate's skating wasn't at the same level as the other players on our team and that it was going to require some work on our part and Nate's part, to get him up to speed, so to speak. So, what we did, was we assigned one coach at every ice time, to work specifically with Nate. While the team practiced various drills, Nate and one of the coaches would work on the basics, getting up from a fallen position, T-pushes, and just gliding on 2 feet with balance. It was awesome to see Nate smile as he got dragged behind one of the horses, in horse and buggy. It was our goal to have Nate catch up with the rest of the team in all of the skills, so as to maximize his enjoyment of the sport.

During our games also, we would have a coach lace up the skates and work with Nate. We would simply tell the refs that we had a player we were working with, and that we would stay out of the way of the play. Nate and one of us coaches would then practice for that hour.

Was this tough for Nate? I think it was. Which is why I find Nate to be so inspiring. It had to have been tough, being the boy who is just learning to skate, joining a group of strangers and wanting to fit in. On several occasions Nate fought tears on the ice. What he was doing was so out of his comfort zone and yet a part of his dreams. It only ever took a little encouragement from a coach before Nate was willing, to try to stand up again, or glide from here to there again, or to make one more lap, again. He was improving. It was amazing to witness.

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It was the middle of November, when Nate was to skate with Team Thunder for his last time.

I am so honoured to have been the coach who's turn it was, to skate with Nate during the game that day. On this day, Joey had informed me that Nate had a bit of a cough due to cold, and that if he needed a break, to give him one. I must say, it's not my style to give kids a break when they show up ready to go. Nate and I went about our workout. We would make a couple laps at a time, then we'd take a break. I could tell Nate was having fun. Nate and I were working on his gliding. I would hold my stick in front of me while skating backwards, Nate would hold the stick and glide forwards. If I started going too fast, he'd tell me to slow down. I'd say ok, and then go just a hair faster. I know that he liked that. There were no tears. On one of these laps however, something did happen. Something that I think about to this day.

On one of those laps Nate said to me, Coach stop, I need a break. It was at this moment that time stood still. I'm not sure what it was in Nate's request that I paid so much attention to. It wasn't the tone of his voice, or anything like that. I suppose it was a warning in my gut that led me to stop. Right then and there, halfway around the half ice, Nate and I took a knee for just a moment. A moment, that for me, will last a lifetime. We stopped and we rested.

The next day I received a phone message from Joey, that Nate had been admitted to the Stollery Children's Hospital and wouldn't be able to return to the rink for the remainder of the season.

The response to hearing about Nate's condition, in my mind, is what any good coach and team would do. We huddled around our player. Once you're a Thunder buddy, you're always a Thunder buddy.

It was at this time, with Nate being sidelined up in the hospital, where he truly made a massive impact on our team, and on myself, as a coach...

From there on out, we would begin our practices with a quick update on how our teammate was holding up. Sometimes the report was about how Nate had overcome multiple odds and was recovering with baby steps. Other times, we were hearing about how Nate took a few steps back but was again recovering with baby steps. It really puts the puck battle in the corner, into perspective, knowing your teammate is battling for his life.

Witnessing the way our team of kids responded has truly been for me one of the best experiences as a coach. Each time I went around the room and asked the kids if we should send a message to Nate, or if they were interested in making a card, or if we should do something for Nate, the response has always been so enthusiastic from each of them. They made cards, they sent messages, their comments, and thoughts so pure and genuine. Our team has been taught by Nate, one of perhaps life's most needed lessons, how to care for another person.

Knowing that Nate was in a major battle, team Thunder decided it was only appropriate that we would hang his jerseys on each of our benches during our games. Those jerseys have made us very aware that we have our health. While we were engaging in puck battles our Thunder buddy was engaged in a life battle. Nate also received his very own Hard Hat Award. The hard hat is a tool we use to encourage players. We give this award, when as coaches, we feel a player has played to his/her own individual maximum potential. Not determined by goals or assists, the hard hat is determined by individual potential and output. Not only at the rink did Nate deserve this award, but in life, not only was he achieving his full

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potential, he was also doing it by way of major output. He had the most heart! I know the team is grateful to have honored Nate with this much deserved award.

Another little thing our team has taken to is a change up in our team cheer. Prior to Nate entering the hospital our team would gather around with gloves in the middle and all yell together, 3-2-1-Thunder. But since our main man has been sidelined the team found it appropriate to yell 3-2-1-Nate! As a coach, every time the team yells this chant, I can't help but be grateful for my health, and the health of our children, still here, playing the game we love!

As Nate's coach, I can honestly say, I am truly humbled. I am humbled to have witnessed such a tremendous outpouring of support for our beloved teammate. Being a channel of so much love has been transforming. It has taught me some lessons as a coach that I will now share.

The first lesson is that being part of a team means, that when you sign up and are on the roster, you're family! Similar to a marriage vow, once you put on a particular jersey, you are pledging allegiance to a group in which you're not certain of the outcome. For better or for worse, in good times and in bad, you're there for each other, you play for each other and you have each other's backs. This is what a team is. Sure, there will be some ups and downs, Wins and Losses, but that's what life is.

The second lesson is that all of the passing plays and team strategy is secondary to how my players are doing. Often times, our players are fighting battles that aren't obvious to us. Performance might drop on the ice and we get frustrated. Sometimes we have an expectation that isn't being met, not realizing that all we need to do is take a knee with our players. Show each player a little personal care at the beginning of each engagement and it will pay dividends down the road. Kids, above all others, will aim to please their coach when they are respected. A lot more happens in life than Hockey. I would encourage all of you coaches, when you enter your dressing room, take a few minutes to go around the room and get to know your players. Shake hands with your players. Ask them how their day was. Maybe test them with a math equation. Give them some indication that their presence is important. This is how you build team chemistry. This is how the team's chemistry builds you.

Thirdly, and this is again for you coaches, when you are missing half of your lineup at practice for the third straight week, don't get upset. Be grateful for the players that are present. Go to practice with the expectation that there will probably be a few missing players. Life presents battles that are sometimes a little bigger than the battles in front of the net. Parents are doing their best, players are doing their best. Sometimes our neighbors struggle, won't allow them to get to the rink. Instead of being judgemental, reach out! That's what a teammate does!

Fourth and finally, this is to you players, the impact that you will have on your team, might not be in the goals and assists, but in how you carry and present yourself. Support your teammates and be good to each other. If a teammate makes a bad play or a game costly mistake, talk to your teammate as if you are their supporter and biggest fan. Nobody screws up on purpose. Make your teammate feel included and you will surely come up with a winning chemistry.

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Nate's impact on our team has far surpassed his ability on the ice. His demonstration of pure courage has left us in awe. Not for one second did Nate ever look behind him and wonder about the refs call. Not for one second did Nate ever question why he was being sent to the penalty box so to speak. He accepted it. He owned it. He faced his life, like a true hockey player... he battled right to the buzzer. How awesome is that!

Nate the Great, it was a pleasure and an honour to be your coach this year. I love you. And loved that you took the risk and tried something new. Your courage and tenacity in the face of all adversity, is unmatched. Thank you for reminding us about what it is to be tough. You faced overwhelming challenges and came out victorious time and time again. You are single-handedly the toughest hockey player I know. You may not be physically with us on the ice, but your presence will surely be felt as team Thunder dedicates the rest of our season to you. You are our Cheer! Thank you for your life and the example you have left us.

You are "like a small boat on the ocean, sending big waves into motion".

Thank you Nate!

