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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SNACK, BABY!

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My son is facing the first heart-wrenching decision of his distinguished athletic career.

OK, so he's five. Just play along.

A scheduling conflict means he has hockey and soccer (indoor) at the same time Saturday morning. He must choose. Look, I know it ain't exactly Bo Jackson deciding between the Royals and the Raiders, but stay with me.

When I presented him with the problem, he paused pensively, clearly weighing his options. I could only imagine the conflict inside his soul:

"Do I don the armor of the rink warrior, feel the incredible surge of steel against ice and the pure primal joy of watching the black saucer come off my stick and press the mesh? Or do I choose the simple, beautiful game of foot on ball; the visceral thrill of bending one like Beckham past the helpless sprawling keeper?"

After a long silence, he responded:

“What are the snacks?”

“Ah...Wha...What do you mean?”

“Which one has the better snack?”

Oh.

Right. The Snack. The single greatest motivation of the child athlete. In the pros, it's all about The Ring. In tyke, it's all about The Snack.

My boy could score a natural hat trick in the final minute to win the league championship, but if there's no Kool-Aid Jammer waiting in the dressing room, he will curl up in the fetal position and weep.

I have seen kids play a full soccer game without getting past “fat-guy light-jogging” speed, then run a 4.2-forty across the field to snag a pack of Fuzzy Peach Maynards.

During one hockey game last month, our team's parents realized mid-game that due to some snack schedule snafu... the dreaded “Snackfu”... no one had brought The Snack. This caused sheer panic and fear in the stands. We all envisioned a team revolt, which would undoubtedly end in tears, tantrums, and in all likelihood, parental bloodshed.

Cameron (4): “Where's my f*&#!\$'in Jooooooooo-ce-boxxxxxx?!”

Dylan (5): “It was Jared's Daddy's turn! That b@\$&* screwed me out of a Rice Krispy Square! Get him!”

Me (39): “Oh God! Please... No! Help Meeeeeeeee!”

Lord of the Freakin' Flies. With skates.

A clearly terrified mother made a desperate run to Loblaws for those mini cheese and cracker thingys. She got back just in time. It was truly heroic.

We never had snacks when I played sports as a kid. Oranges, baby. It was all about the oranges.

I try to tell my kid that, and he looks at me like I'm a caveman.

“You ate oranges for The Snack? Was that before or after you discovered fire?”

My wife is a health nut. She wanted to do that Norma Rae thing, you know, make a snack stand. When it was our turn for The Snack at hockey, she wanted to bring bottled water, and apples or carrots or broccoli or... something sadistic like that.

My son was ready to walk right there. He was out of the family. He was prepared to put his face on the milk carton. Dude, your parents bring vegetables for The Snack? You are done. Your joyful boyhood is over. You won't see the puck/ball all season. It's a lifetime of atomic wedgies.

One Dad brought full-size ice-cream bars and Bibo Juice for The Snack (Bibo is very big. It's the Red Bull of the JK-SK crowd.). He was God. He had 11 kids ready to do anything he asked. This must be how cults get formed.

In the end, my kid chose soccer this weekend. Hockey is just a practice, and there is no guarantee of The Snack after practice (which he and a group of friends are actively lobbying to change). He figures soccer is a sure thing.

But just in case, he wants me to bring The Backup Snack. He developed the concept of The Backup Snack after that near miss at soccer last summer. It's a safety in case the designated snack parent fails to show.

The kid is good. It's only a matter of time before he has a Snack Agent.

"Look, he gets the chocolate-covered oatmeal bar or he doesn't dress, got it? He doesn't do plain or marshmallow!"

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***Postscript:** He's 10 now. His hockey coach has banned the snack, but they still have it in soccer. We brought Freezies recently and I forgot to put ice in the cooler. They melted. He almost filed for emancipation on the spot.*