

TSUMURA: It's now 30 years and counting, and the writing continues to remain a true passion



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High School



Pitt Meadows senior boys basketball coach Rich Goulet is one of a number of coaches who sets the daily bar high for the author. (Photo -- Saskatoon Star-Phoenix)

NORTH DELTA — It's New Year's Day 2013 as I sit down to write, a hot cup of coffee at my side.

I started thinking about that last digit a lot over the holiday break, and it turns out, after a little investigation on my own part, that years ending in three have been a little like personal signposts over a writing career I still can't believe actually happened.

Seriously, if this whole journalism thing didn't work out, I shudder to think what I'd be doing today.

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I was born in 1963, got my first newspaper job in 1983, and after six years covering the NBA and two more on the junior hockey beat, I resumed full-time reporting as The Province's high school and university sports reporter in 2003.

So here we are in 2013, the year I will turn 50, and the year I celebrate my 30th season of reporting on sports in B.C.

It's been a most amazing road.

I started my first job a week shy of my 20th birthday, barely older than the high school basketball players I was interviewing on the first team I ever covered, the boys' senior varsity Houston (B.C.) Wolverines, which won the B.C. North Central zone title (they beat Smithers) and advanced to the provincial Single A tournament in 1983-84.

I can't believe I can still remember that. The seniors on that team, I would guess, are turning 47 this year. But that is the most fun part, the remembering.

I was in a gym watching some spring league basketball a while back when I noticed a dad in the stands, cheering on his son's team.

"Kore Jana?" I asked him.

He nodded.

"Ahh, Kore Jana, Queen Elizabeth Royals, uhh, 1987, '88?" I continued, so stoked that I recognized someone who was 18 the last time I saw him.

A great little point guard, to be sure. Now in his early 40's, he is the father of St. Thomas More's star three-sport athletes Jalen and Terrell Jana.

It's at moments like this, when you've covered the athletes who are now the dads of the kids you are writing about, that you say to yourself "Man, am I getting old."

Somewhere along the way, you start getting called Mr. Tsumura, or Sir. But you just keep showing up in the gyms and at the fields. Season after season. Decade after decade.

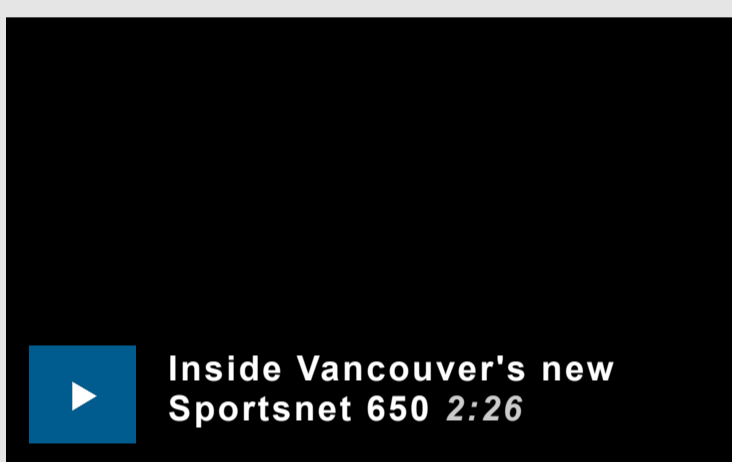
And the reason you do is because covering the high schools keeps you and your spirit eternally young.

It is the same reason, I am sure, that some of the guys that were already coaching when I started reporting, are still doing what they do best.

Although I know they will one day retire — sadly, sooner than later — I can't fathom covering my beats without guys like Bill Disbrow, Rich Goulet, Ken Dockendorf and Rich Chambers around to chat with.

In early December, after reporting on a big win by Sardis over Goulet's Pitt Meadows Marauders in the opening round of the Telus Classic tournament, I needed a place to write my story for the next day's print editions.

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Goulet, as usual, opened his classroom to me. But as I sat there writing my piece, I couldn't help but spend more of my time watching him sitting at his own desk. He interacted with parents and players who came through the door, he counted and balanced all of the funds generated through the day's concessions sales, he prepared for his classroom lessons, and then, after about 90 minutes or so, he excused himself from the room.

I finished writing, filed my story, and prepared to hit the road, but as I left his classroom, I realized the entire school was empty, save for Goulet's voice, and the sound of squeaking sneakers in one of the gyms.


I poked my head through the door, saw him coaching the school's Grade 8 boys team, and asked him if he wanted me to lock his classroom door.

"Don't worry," he said. "There's no one else in the school."

I'm 30 years into this thing, and I plan on sticking around for a long time yet. Football season was awesome. Basketball's championship season beckons. As usual, I am excited. I can't wait.

I try to write each day like those guys coach. I can't think of any other way.

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