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"Man of the Year"

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Hockey's second season is my favorite time of the sport's calendar. No other sport (and I enjoy many of them) has anything like a hockey playoff game that goes into multiple overtime periods. Every time the puck is fired toward the goal, no matter how harmless the attempt may seem, it could end the game. If the Griffins score Van Andel crowd shrieks in unison as it leaps to its feet thrusting arms in the air. The crowd sits in stunned silence, than slowly makes its way to the exits when the visitors score.

Today's letter is not about the hockey playoffs, but one of the men who makes hockey special. I would like to tell you about Bryan Helmer the Grand Rapids Griffin's Man of the Year. Bryan was one of the leading defenders in the American Hockey League again this year. He was selected to the Second All-Star Team. He lead all defensemen in plus/minus with a plus 25 rating. (He was on the ice for 25 more Griffin's goals than opponents goals.) Helmer was one of only two Griffins to play in every game this year. As the only veteran among the defenseman, he providing leadership and a steadying influence on the young defenseman and goalies.

Bryan's contributions to the West Michigan Community rather than his on ice accomplishments make him the Man of the Year. The veteran established the "Helmer's Heroes" program to support the DeVos Children's Hospital and its young patients. Bryan purchased six season tickets for donation to the Hospital. The generous donation allows hospitalized children and their families to attend games sitting in the special "Helmer's Heroes" section. After the game his special guests tour the locker room, meet Bryan and his teammates and receive a special designed autograph stick.

For the last two years we have been working with Bryan to support the Humane Society of Kent County through the Griffin's Charitable Goals program. The idea behind the program is that a sponsor contributes \$50 to the designated charity for every goal their player scores. In our case Bryan insisted that since he did not view himself as a big goal scoring threat that we contribute \$50 for every point he earns and he would personally match our contribution. Over the last two years, through his on ice effort and his personal generosity over \$8000 has been contributed to the Humane Society. Bryan's contribution has not just been monetary, but he always seems willing to give his time to Community Activities. He participates in all the Griffin's community activities from the Great Skate to hospital and youth hockey team visits. When we asked Bryan to attend the Humane Society Home for the Holidays on a Sunday in early December he eagerly accepted our invitation. Bryan signed autographs and brought an autographed hockey stick for auction. Even though the Griffin's had just completed playing three games in three days the night before the event, he charmed everyone at the open house. From three year old with sticky fingers to the grandmother who had come to come to adopt a new best friend, he found the time and patience to be gracious with everyone.

If you or one of your children needs a real sportsman as a role model, I would like to recommend Bryan Helmer, our Gentleman of the Year.

Go Griffins!!!

Harry Gribnitz

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