

Tears in Humboldt - a nation understands Tragedy on our Field of Dreams

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It is a Junior playoff series that will never be finished, a championship that may never be decided, and a small town left stunned and in mourning. The terrible tragedy that befell the Humboldt Broncos Junior hockey team last week has left a dark cloud over a town, a province, and a nation where flags are lowered to half staff and moments of silence are held at hockey games in memory of those who died and in support of those who were injured. If you're Canadian you've either played hockey or know someone who does. From east to west, in every province, every city, every small town, it is the game that holds the thread that connects communities together through a common love of the sport. It's the True North's version of a Field of Dreams ? if you build a hockey rink, find a frozen pond or lake, or use the garden hose to create a backyard ice pad ? they will come. The tragedy has spanned across the pond with hockey teams in other countries paying tribute to a team they had never played and never even heard of. They understand the commitment, the community, and the bond that is created by being members of a team. It takes a lot of dedication and commitment to be a Junior level hockey player. Kids juggle school, jobs, a social life, friends and family, with weekly practices, home games, and road trips. The coaches, trainers, and assistants put in countless hours keeping the team together and doing behind the scenes work that the fans never see. Parents have spent many hours, weeks, and months in arenas over the years watching their young players hone their skills and advance through the ranks. In smaller towns, quite often the local Junior team in many ways defines the community. Attendance records from the Saskatchewan Junior League games show how popular these teams are. These players come up through the minor hockey system meeting friends and teammates and their families along the way. Many parents and fans will remember these kids as younger players as they scrapped their way up through the Novice, Peewee and Bantam level and played alongside their own kids on the ice. It's a community where you watch young players grow and develop and the fans come to see them play their best with the hometown colours and logo blazed across their jerseys. It's no wonder this tragedy has affected an entire community and rippled across the country. Every week during hockey season buses head out filled with teams travelling to another town for an away game. They are all connected through the team, the town, families, friends, and the sport. It is a story that is far from over ? fifteen died in the tragedy ? but there are others who remain in critical or serious condition in hospital. What the future holds for those injured is yet to be seen but no doubt they all face an incredible battle ahead of them. What happened at a highway intersection on the wide open spaces that define Saskatchewan affects us all through a common bond of a nationally loved sport and and the realization that it could have happened closer to home.