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RED DEER ADVOCATE

Funny, heart-felt 'Dad' scores

By Lana Michelin - Red Deer Advocate

Published: October 29, 2010 8:59 AM

Like his hockey hero Wayne Gretzky, Todd Williams also practised on a backyard rink as a child and had an eager hockey dad, who spurred him on from the stands.

But Williams was no Gretzky.

And that's the tragedy behind the largely humorous one-man play Hockey Dad: A Play in Three Periods, which runs through Saturday at the Scott Block theatre.

The entertaining production from Calgary's Burnt Thicket Theatre is about what happens all too often in competitive-league hockey — how the fun is sucked out of the game for many kids by parents with too high expectations.

Hopes couldn't be much higher for poor Todd, who was born the moment Paul Henderson scored the generation-defining goal that won the 1972 Canada-Russia series in the eighth game.

This fluke of fate convinces his hockey-mad father that Todd is destined for greatness on the ice in this play, which was originally written for fringe performance by James Popoff and Stephen Waldschmidt.

In reality, all the practising in the world can't elevate Todd to Gretzky levels.

In fact, by the time he's 16 years old, Todd is playing on the D Team for the Lloydminster Blades — "and there was no E Team," recalled the character (played by the irrepressible Popoff) of his torture years.



Todd Williams, played by James Popoff, celebrates Paul Henderson's game-winning goal that won the 1972 Canada-Russia series during Hockey Dad: A Play in Three Periods at the Scott Block Wednesday night. The play by Calgary's Burnt Thicket Theatre continues its four-night run through Saturday night. Tickets are \$15 or \$12 in advance — though anyone wearing a hockey jersey gets in for the advance rate — and are available at the door, at 103, 4816 50th Ave., or from the website [www.burntthicket.com](#), or by calling 1-403-274-8847. by RANDY FIEDLER/Advocate staff

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The teenage Todd has such nightmarish associations about disappointing his father through hockey that he vows to never lace up his skates again.

Fast-forward a couple of decades and Todd's repressed feelings about Canada's favourite past-time rise like a monster from the tar pits

Actually, he breaks into a cold sweat when his hockey-obsessed daughter, Sarah, asks him to play with her in a father/daughter hockey game.

Hockey Dad: a Play in Three Periods, which is directed by Waldschmidt and contains some video footage, starts and ends in that dressing room.

And during its 70-minute run, it offers some truly funny, heart-felt and exciting moments — like when Todd gives a verbal play-by-play recap of the final moments of that Canada-Russia game when Henderson gave all Canucks something to be proud of.

(Does anyone else feel a twang of nostalgia at the very mention of that quintessential Canadian hockey name: Yvan Cournoyer?)

Hockey Dad imaginatively draws on Shakespeare and Don Quixote to help Todd slay the dreaded "hockey-saurus."

And it generates belly-laughs with clever audience participation as front-row "hockey fans" were grabbed by Todd to participate in between-period activities, such as the time-honoured net-shot-for-a-million-bucks contest.

Of course, the play also has poignant things to say about father-son and father-daughter relationships.

Since it doesn't deke around unpleasant truths about how our national game is soured for many children, it might hit close to the bone for certain parents — which is not a bad thing.

As for the rest of us, you don't have to be a hockey fan to enjoy the play — or even be an adult, for that matter.

Hockey Dad offers some good off-ice bonding moments for real-life hockey dads — and moms — and their kids (recommended for ages nine and up).

Tickets are available at the door.

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