

“Welcome back, Hawks! And a warm welcome to our new players. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Coach Howie, one of the six coaches running the evaluations. Last year I coached Team Four.”

“Yeah!” Everyone from last year’s Team Four, including Tom and his friends, cheered.

Coach Howie held up his hand. “The next seven days are going to be crazy. We have over a hundred players to place on six Novice teams. We have three evaluation groups.”

*Fifteen skaters and two goalies will make a team, thought Tom, doing the math. Thirty-four in each evaluation group.*

Coach Howie said, “Before you head out onto the ice, in front of the evaluators, I want you to THINK about one big question: WHY? Why do you play minor hockey?”

“NHL!” someone shouted out.

Coach Howie smiled, but didn’t respond.

Tom thought about his answer. He loved the game of hockey. He loved playing with his friends. He loved being part of a team. “It’s fun!” Tom exclaimed.

“Right on!” said Coach Howie. He taped a Hockey Canada poster to the wall. The caption read, *RELAX! IT’S JUST A GAME!*

“Now get out there, forget about the evaluators and just try your best!” said Coach Howie.

The door opened.

Mark turned to Stuart, Jordan and Tom. Each boy put out a gloved fist and banged one on top of another, ending with a loud yelp, “Hawks!”

Tom looked at Harty and said, “Let’s work extra hard out there, like when we were at Champs Hockey Camp!”