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## LOCAL NEWS

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### Ashton just wants to coach

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The man in the wheelchair calling the shots from the NDG Lynx dugout at the Canadian Junior Little League Championships knows a thing or two about being a couple of strikes in the hole.

Carey Ashton, head coach of the Quebec entry in the baseball tournament, has battled the effects of muscular dystrophy all his life. His parents were told years ago he might not live beyond young adulthood.

He's now 46 and each year the disease which deteriorates his muscles progresses a little further. He never knows when that third strike will get past him but in the meantime, he hangs in there, figuratively fouling off pitches — and inspiring his ball club and others in the process.

Ashton acknowledges some might see him as an example of what people with physical challenges can accomplish but that's not his motivation.

"I just want to coach," he says from his wheelchair, which is parked in the shade at his favourite place — the ball park.

"There's nothing better than being at the ball park on a summer day," says Ashton. "It's just a great place."

Ashton has been a head coach for 10 years with the NDG Minor Baseball League — the same league that produced Los Angeles Dodgers catcher Russell Martin — in Notre-Dame-de-Grace, a borough of Montreal. He's spent the past seven years with the competitive program. In the fall, he serves as a bench coach with the McGill University baseball program.

"I love the game," he says. "It's the purest form of sport."

He played Little League baseball as a youngster, though he was limited by the muscular dystrophy. "I couldn't run," he says. By his late teens, the effects of the disease forced him to quit playing and by his early 20s, he was in a wheelchair. But that didn't end his involvement with the game. He coached softball for a time. Then, when his son was playing in the NDG league, "they didn't have enough coaches and someone asked me to help out. By the end of the year, I was running the team."

He's been in the dugout ever since, though he admits that wouldn't be possible without his assistant coaches, David Goldberg and Jan Sauve-Frankel.

"They carry so much of the workload," says Ashton. "We're a team within a team."

The players do their part, too, tending to his needs, such as fetching drinks to help their coach maintain his fluid intake.

Being in a wheelchair isn't an obstacle, for the most part, says Ashton, except when it comes to getting into certain dugouts.

"Or if there's an umpire I'd like to go argue with," he jokes.

But overall, having muscular dystrophy hasn't stopped him from enjoying a mostly normal life.

"I'm not disabled, I'm less-abled," says Ashton, who's been married for 19 years and has three children, ages 17, nine and four.

That said, he admits it's sometimes a struggle to keep coaching. His strength has diminished just since last season.

"There's times I'm very sick," he says. "Coaching these kids keeps me wanting to go out and stay as healthy as I can. I love the boys and I love being at the ball park."

Parents of the Lynx players have encouraged Ashton to continue coaching and even raised money to provide an adapted van for transportation. Arrangements were also made for such a van for him in Lethbridge.

Ashton knows each season could be his last but he's not one to dwell on the negative.

"Nobody wants to be in this situation," he says, "but I'm happy with where I am. There are people with MD who don't have long lives."

Ashton's already into extra innings and as long as he can make it to the ball park, he intends to keep swinging. The game isn't over until the final out — and he's a tough out.

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