

## **Jason Becker**

Jason Becker is in his second season as head coach of the Pacific Coast Hockey Academy (PCHA) U18 Prep team, having previously spent time in the Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL) with Okanagan Hockey Academy and St. George's School. Becker originally got his coaching career started in the Western Hockey League (WHL) with the Prince George Cougars. He would spend five years as well as another three in the British Columbia Hockey League (BCHL) as an assistant coach with the Penticton Vees. Prior to starting his coaching career Becker would spend four seasons playing in the WHL and five more with the University of Saskatchewan. He would have a nine year professional career with stops in Germany, England and the United States.

JM: The world's kind of back to normal now. Restrictions are starting to ease up although we might be going the other way now. But what is or was one thing you're excited to do again as COVID started to, we'll say, go away?

JB: That's a great question. There's obviously a lot that was put on hold for us as a country here, but I think what I'm looking forward most to, like any coach, is seeing the kids play the game of hockey and compete against their peers and kids in their age group. This is what they attend the sports schools for. First and foremost, the education part, but then, get to challenge themselves against the best kids in Western Canada.

JM: Absolutely. Tell me a little bit about where you grew up, where you live now, and then the family life or pets. Anything like that.

JB: For sure. I grew up in Saskatoon. I played all my minor hockey and started my first year in junior there. I spent four and a half years in the Western Hockey League, and then, made my way to the University of Saskatchewan where I went for five years and obtained my degree in Human Geography. After that, lucky to have a nine-year professional playing career. The majority of it took me to Europe, which is a great life experience for anyone that gets that opportunity. During that time, I married my wife. We have two kids, fifteen and sixteen years old. When we did make the move to British Columbia, we ended up getting our first pet. I do have an eleven-year-old Black Lab. Made every move with us since we've been in BC here.

JM: Oh, nice. Were your kids born in Germany?

JB: No. Actually, well, my daughter was born in Cardiff, Wales when I was playing there, and my son was born in Reading, Pennsylvania when I was spending some time in the East Coast League.

JM: That's cool. What's the first thing you would do if you won the lottery?

JB: Probably, plan my dream vacation.

JM: Okay, what would that be?

JB: Great question. I think it's just anywhere with sand and water and golf.

JM: I'd probably do the same. Favorite animal?

JB: I think I'd have to go with a lion.

JM: Any reason in particular?

JB: Obviously, well, it's looked upon as a leader and king of the Jungle. Powerful animals. They command respect. Earn respect through their pride. Gets his respect from his team.

JM: That's a good one. Biggest pet peeve?

JB: Being late.

JM: If you could go back in time, what year would you travel to and why?

JB: Unbelievable question. Wow. I think as a hockey person, 1972 and be able to watch The Summit Series.

JM: Do you have a go-to karaoke song?

JB: Oh, geez. No. Not a karaoke person. But if I'm in the car and I know the words, I try and sing as best as I can.

JM: That's totally fair. What's something about you most people from around the hockey world might not know about you that's either interesting or a big part of your life.

JB: I'd like to think my heritage. I don't think a lot of people realize that my mom came from the Philippines. When their family migrated to Hawaii, she made the decision to come to Canada and that's where she met my dad. I think a lot of people I've met understand that, but a lot of people don't understand my heritage and it's something I'm very proud of. Being a minority in the game of hockey here. In regards to that, but I don't feel myself as a minority. I've been very accepted in every kind of role that I've done within hockey here.

JM: Does your mom still have family in the Philippines? Have you ever been there?

JB: No. Well, no, I shouldn't say that. I think there are probably some cousins that are still there, but the majority of her direct family is still in Hawaii right now.

JM: Okay. Do you go there then often?

JB: As a kid growing up, yes. It seemed like we were there almost every second or third year. Just recently, I think since I've been married, we've been there three times.

JM: Not a lot of offseason, obviously, in the CSSHL with recruiting and everything. But what do you like to do in your spare time away from the rink?

JB: Like most, I like the sport of golf. Obviously, with as busy as the winter that we have, family time and family vacations. We try and get away as a family at least once a year where it's just the four of us. If the dog is available to come, he comes with us. I'd say that's the majority that I spend that free time in the summer.

JM: How did you get involved kind of in your current role with the CSSHL and everything?

JB: I was very fortunate. My coaching career started in the Western Hockey League with the Prince George Cougars. I slowly found that in applying for head coaching positions, the one thing that was really holding me back was the lack of head coach experience. And so, I felt this was a great opportunity to develop my coaching path. But coming to Okanagan Hockey Academy when I started here in Penticton, it was something that really helped develop me as a person too. I really had to learn new communication tools and how to teach the game in a different way. Not that they're not elite athletes, but when you're in the Western League, these kids have a goal. They've already gone through the minor hockey and everything. The expectation is there to execute, whereas, at our level, we're still teaching and developing the players. To see them develop that way really brought me down to the grassroots level of teaching and development. It's something that I really appreciate the time that I had at Okanagan Hockey Academy. It really opened some doors for myself in the hockey world.

I'm just very passionate about this. About hockey, coaching, and developing. I think the biggest thing you get asked a lot is, "Why did you get into it?" I think, for me, it's all about

giving back. Some of the most influential people I had growing up were your hockey coaches. I'd like to have the positive impact that they had on me with the kids that I have an opportunity to be the coach. That's something that I think every coach looks for. They always like this. We always talked about getting that phone call in five to ten years after the players there, because it's something that we said to them that had an effect on them, or something that they want to stay in touch with us because we treated them properly. If that makes sense.

JM: Awesome. What about the CSSHL model do you like the most?

JB: I like the ability of the mix of education and athletics in the time period where kids are getting lots of activity, but obviously, getting the proper education time during a regular school day where they can accomplish a lot between, let's say, 8:00am and 3:30pm of the day. I think it's great for elite student-athletes. They still have time to be a teenager in the evening or stay on top of their studies. That way too.

JM: Absolutely. This one doesn't have to be hockey-related. The best piece of advice you've ever received in life?

JB: If you're going to say it, do it, but do it better than anyone else.

JM: Okay. Did you hear that from anyone in particular?

JB: Actually, that's my University head coach.

JM: Okay. Last one for you here. Your favorite hockey memory? So, just looking back on the game, what's something that always stands out to you? If you have more than one, that's fine too.

JB: I think the championships are great, but I think for me with the amount of moving I did in junior and pro; I think it's just the friendships made across the world. I still have good friends that I played minor hockey with, junior hockey with, that I played professionally with that are of European descent. Russian, German, Finnish. Some of my best friends are the friendships that I made playing hockey. Facebook's one of the greatest things because it allows us to stay in touch with a lot of the people that we grew up with or played hockey with. I was able to still stay in touch and still communicate with everyone that way.