

Jesse Ferguson

Jesse Ferguson has been principal at the Ontario Hockey Academy in Cornwall, Ontario, for seven years. Before that, he taught for several years at Cape Breton University. His hobbies include weightlifting and music. Jesse is a firm believer in how sports and fitness offer an essential balance for school work. He lives in Cornwall with his wife, a teacher at OHA, and his son whose main sports are soccer and weightlifting.

JM: I'm not too sure what it's like in Ontario, but what's the one thing you're most excited to do or were most excited to do as things go back to normal?

JF: Well, obviously the biggest thing is that our teams can play other teams in the division and so on. That is the main reason that the kids are here. It's an important part of their morale. Obviously, that's the biggest thing we're looking forward to. Also, that they can just go off-site to Tim Hortons or the Walmart or things like that, just to get out and stretch their legs a little bit off-site is very important for their morale too.

JM: Tell me a little bit about yourself in terms of your family situation, where you live now, where you grew up, kind of those types of things.

JF: Sure. My wife and I are both from Cornwall, Ontario which is where the school is located. We moved out east for about 10 years when I was doing my doctoral work and she was doing University as well out on the east coast. Then we moved back to work here which we also liked in terms of being close to the rest of our family. I have one son and my wife is currently also a teacher here at the school.

JM: Okay, cool. What is one thing you're not good at that maybe you wish you were?

JF: I guess knowing a lot about hockey, stats, and things like that. One thing people are often surprised is that I don't have a really big hockey background even though I work here. Like I grew up playing it like everybody else on ponds and ball hockey in the street, but I never played at the kind of high level that these students have. That's one area where I could improve as my knowledge of the big teams and the rules of the game and so on. It might be surprising for someone who works at a hockey school.

JM: If you were to eat one food for every meal for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

JF Probably, I would say spaghetti. With meat and vegetables just because everybody likes it and it's got all the nutrients you need. Something that we make quite a bit at my house.

JM: Okay. As a principal of this school, it's probably a big part of your life, but what's your favorite school subject?

JF: My favorite school subject was always English. That's what I majored in college.

JM: Yeah. I see you got a Bachelor of Arts in English literature.

JF: Yeah. Masters and I did most of my PhD in it but I never actually finished that off. So, Masters was highest completed but I did several years of the PhD work on it as well.

JM: You went to University of Ottawa and then University of New Brunswick?

JF: That's right.

JM: Okay, cool. What would be your go-to karaoke song?

JF: Probably 'My Way' by Frank Sinatra.

JM: Okay, that's an interesting one. Any reason?

JF: I'm actually a singer like I play out in restaurants and pubs.

JM: Oh, okay. How long have you been doing that?

JF: Probably 20 years. I've done over 200 professional gigs.

JM: Oh, wow. Big venues?

JF: I do classic rock and things like that in pubs and so on, but I also do traditional folk music. The biggest shows I've ever done are probably the 'Highland Games'.

JM: Okay, cool. Was that kind of the dream growing up to be a musician?

JF: Not really. It's always been a really big part of my life. But I kind of never really wanted to have that kind of lifestyle, like on the road all the time you know, the partying lifestyle. I want to have a regular life like most people do. Family and a stable income and a stable place. I wouldn't mind the money but I don't think I'd want the lifestyle.

JM: Yeah, that's fair. If you could spend one day living as a different person, who would it be and why?

JF: That's a good question. I would probably trade places with one of my idols is Brian Shaw. He's a four times world's strongest man. My big interest is weightlifting as well. He is definitely one of my idols. Probably one of the strongest men in history.

JM: You kind of touched on this, that you don't know as much about hockey as people might think you would. But what's something about you that most people from around the hockey world wouldn't know about you that maybe is a big part of your life or an interesting part of your life?

JF: Possibly the music stuff, I guess. Sometimes the kids around school they'll find my music on Spotify. They sort of mentioned that they like it. But I try not to promote it too much with the kids just because I don't want to seem like I'm bragging or anything like that.

JM: Trying to stay humble. What do you like to do in your spare time?

JF: Well, that would music would be one and then the other one is weight lifting. I have a pretty decent home gym that I've set up. Occasionally, I'll do workouts in the gym here at the school but it's a little congested with the kids in there. I usually just do them after work whenever I go home.

JM: How did you get involved in your current role?

JF: Well, we moved back from the east coast to be closer to home and my wife got the job here at the school as a teacher first. My son was going through leukemia treatments. Only one of us could really work full-time. She had been off with him for a few years while he was in treatment while I was working at least but I took that one year off to be his primary caregiver while she started here. Then once my son was out of treatment, they offered me the position of principal here.

JM: What about the CSSHL model do you like? Assuming it's probably pretty obvious as a principal.

JF: I think it's good to have an association that is sort of looking over and developing consistency among the schools that are within that group. I think that there's a lot of room for that in terms of quality assurances, equal standards across the different teams and schools that are part of it. I like that aspect of it.

JM: Okay. Best piece of advice you've ever gotten in life.

JF: I guess it probably would be from my dad which is even if you're doing something that seems boring like sweeping a floor or doing the dishes, make sure you always do it right and avoid doing it over again. You bring that forward to sports and obviously schooling and so on to just stamp your name on it. Make sure you do it to the best of your abilities. It's common advice, I guess but even to apply to things that seem boring or not that important to you. Even still just to make sure you're doing them to the best of your ability.

JM: No, that's perfect. That's all I have for you. Is there anything else you'd like to add about yourself or the Ontario Hockey Academy?

JF: I guess that pretty much covers it. I think one thing to add too is though I didn't come in with a big hockey background when I took over the job, each year that I'm doing this position, I'm starting to appreciate the value that those high-level sports have for the academic side. Usually, the top guys we have on the ice are also guys who are top in the classroom. I think that that's a great thing to see. The longer I do the job, the more I come to see how they reinforce each other quite well.