

BOOK REVIEW

Debut novel a “hilarious tale” about minor hockey

By James Hrynyshyn

Historians insist that war is just “the continuation of policy by other means.” But anyone who’s spent enough time in Ottawa knows that the real stand-in for politics is minor league hockey.

Or so we learn from *Puck Luck*, the new novel by Ottawa writer and Old Ottawa South resident David Wylynko. The novel has been described by reviewers as “a rollicking portrait of the mad, mad, world of minor hockey.”

Puck Luck follows the frustrations and occasional triumphs of a down-on-his luck minor hockey coach, Danny Wilde, who finds himself coerced into the Machiavellian schemes of crazed hockey parents while trying to win back the affections of his semi-estranged wife and daughter. Much mayhem ensues, both on and off the ice.

demand so much more of a coach than he’s willing to give ... at first. “I’ve had the basic idea of this story in my head forever,” said Wylynko, who grew up playing in the sub-zero prairie arenas of Winnipeg and has been writing professionally since his teens. “But it was experiencing the outrageous goings-on in minor hockey as a coach over the years that really compelled me to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard. It’s satire, and I hope folks enjoy it.”

While many scenes border on the farcical, Wylynko’s generously distributed (and scrupulously researched) hockey-culture references keep the narrative believable.

The book’s cast of characters includes fanatical hockey parents who demand their kids get more ice time, corrupt league executives with ulterior motives, and teens who

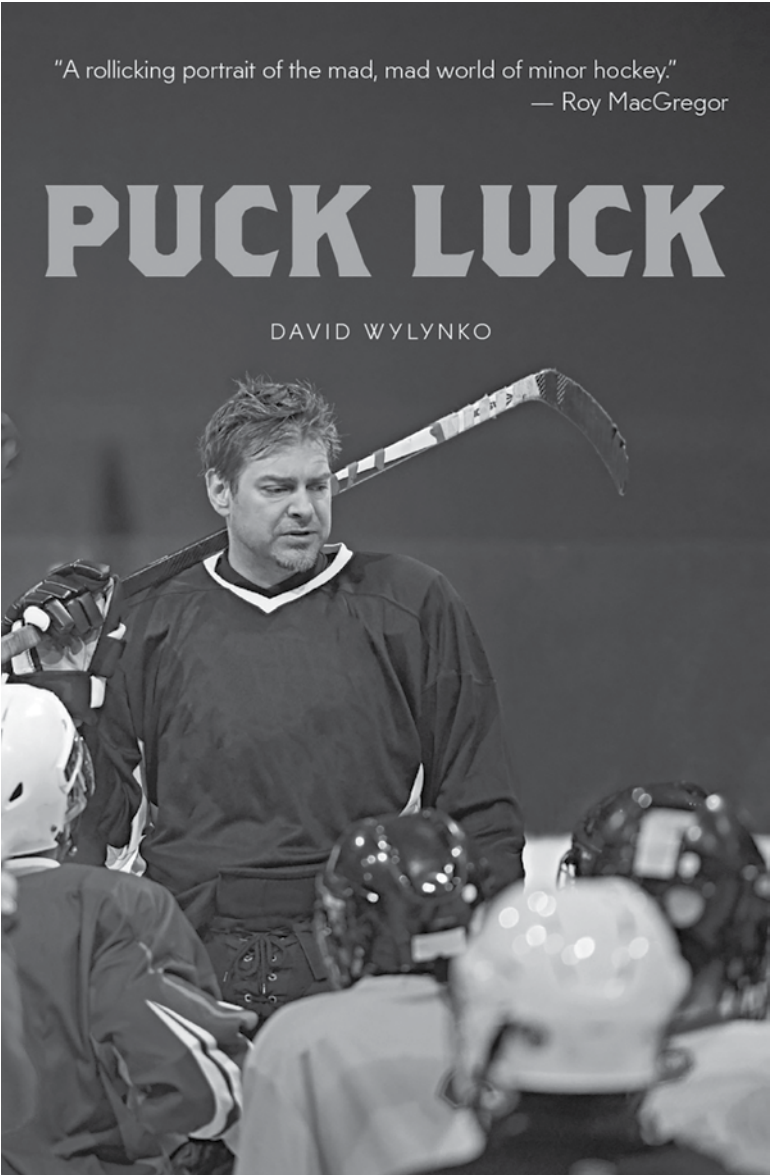
(An excerpt from chapter 1 of David Wylynko’s novel *Puck Luck*.)

It wasn’t looking good. The men’s league had been trying to get rid of him for years. He’d likely have to move, maybe even to Toronto. Well, why not? The water was warm, if you threw in his pending court date for an inflated mischief charge and the bogus non-contact order Vanessa laid on him, which had forced him to move into a unit in a five-storey, dormitory-style storage locker. Plus the near total collapse of his contracting business due to a minor on-ice altercation with one of his top customers. Duster.

A classic anti-hero, Wilde is a relatively simple, and sometimes capable, middle-aged home-renovations contractor who has made a long list of questionable decisions. Much of the story’s tension hinges on Wilde’s interaction with hockey parents and team organizers, who

just want to be teens. There is also a serious underbelly to the tale, as Wylynko describes the consequences of the violence that permeates contact hockey.

Early reviews are positive. Globe and Mail columnist Roy MacGregor, who has written volumes about



hockey over the past 40 years and has been dubbed the godfather of hockey journalism in Canada, says Wylynko’s tale demonstrates a keen understanding of minor hockey and the “wacky culture of beer leagues.”

TSN hockey host James Duthie calls *Puck Luck* “a hilarious tale full of outrageous characters and moments we all recognize from life at the rink. It’s an insider’s view of the rushing intensity and comic absurdity of the game we love.”

Ottawa Citizen hockey writer Ken Warren says the novel captures “the spirit – and spirits – of where the game lives for most Canadians: beer league and minor hockey. It will

make you laugh, and maybe even cry, at the bureaucracy and seriousness” that Canadians invest in the sport.

Puck Luck will be available for (virtual) purchase at the end of May. Meanwhile, learn more and read an excerpt at www.puckluck.hockey.

A former Ottawa-based journalist, James Hrynyshyn is a senior editor with West Hawk Associates, publisher of Puck Luck, based in North Carolina.

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speech. And I’m half done.” He smiled, as several people applauded. “A 2 degree warmer planet is not one that has ever supported our species. Sure, the planet’s been warmer. Much warmer. But neither humans, nor most of the critters, trees or crops that are a part of our era existed then. Nor I believe, could they survive it. The atmospheric conditions and ocean acidity and hydrologic cycles would very likely set off a death spiral for all today’s ecosystems. “Stability and civility will no longer be possible. You watch the news: mass migration out of Africa; caravans of

desperation out of Central America; disease, social breakdown and extreme economic uncertainty. What we’re not yet seeing is collapse on a scale where people give up entirely on government, the police, courts, hospitals and schools. Where we enter a world that is basically survival of the meanest. Heavily armed, with nuclear weapons and unmanaged chemical and biological waste. “Conjecture, Dr. Sagan, I hear some say. You promised us facts.” He could see several people nodding vigorously, defiantly. “I did. So, where are we now, and what would be required to stay under 2 degrees? I’ll examine the numbers. Then I’ll venture into the ugly world of policy and law – where the real battle lies. It was never about the science.”

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