

## 5IVE QUESTIONS

... WITH A HOCKEY-PLAYING SURGEON

# Scoring goals on and off the ice

Robert Feldman, a surgeon affiliated with St. Anthony Community Hospital in Warwick, is one good skate.

By Deborah J. Botti  
For the Times Herald-Record

He's passionate about his family, his religion, his profession – and ice hockey. He plays and he also coaches youngsters on the ice. Even the family pet, a young bichon frisé, is named Skater.

## A surgeon who plays ice hockey?

I've always been drawn to team sports, from which you can draw so many lessons about life. I played football in high school, and being in decent shape has always been important. I guess there's a connection there between sports, health and medicine.

I didn't play hockey, though, until the end of college. I'm in a nonchecking league with an interesting group of guys, a cross-section that ranges from state trooper to insurance agent.

## And you coach, too?

I'm bigger, stronger, faster, so I can still beat my 8-year-old son – although he's really better than I am. My daughter figure-skates, and sometimes we'll all get on Rollerblades and

play around in the basement at home. The last time, the 15-month-old picked up a hockey stick and looked at his older brother. ...

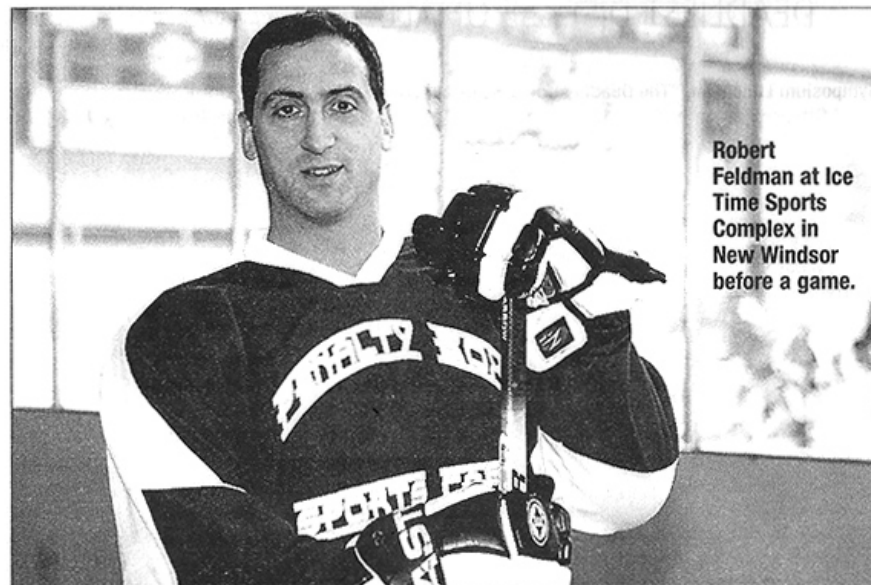
And that's what I bring to coaching the kids – it should be fun. The scoreboard doesn't make you a winner.

I once coached a kid who was scared to get on the ice. I told him to take it at his own pace, and I gave him his jersey. He was part of the team. He showed incredible heart and ended the season as "most improved."

## How do you find the time?

You make time for the things you want to do. My wife's an ear, nose and throat doctor. We have three children. It's crazy, but it works.

We also live a Jewish life. Our religion is important to us, and we're grateful for our faith.



Robert Feldman at Ice Time Sports Complex in New Windsor before a game.

For the Times Herald-Record/KEITH FERRIS

In med school, there were many students who just ate, slept and studied. I've always needed more. If it's important, you do it.

## What's most rewarding about being a surgeon?

I meet the most terrific people – often not at a high point of their lives. Some are battling serious diseases, yet they're so thankful and cooperative. They express their appreciation with cards, letters and even gifts. If I didn't have to feed a family, that would be enough.

When I was a third-year med student, I had my first doctor-patient experience. A drunken driver slammed into a car of young girls. One or two died. One was paralyzed. She was my patient. I was dumbfounded, caught up in the academics, trying to make sense of the science. At the same time, I was overwhelmed with humanity. Her family even sent me a gift, a seemingly insignificant medical student. I'll never forget it.

## Are there other pivotal cases that come to mind?

One of the most inspirational was a patient in his mid-50s who had the most advanced case of diabetes I ever saw. It could not be controlled. His fingertips were eroded because of poor circulation, and we had to amputate a few. He was in a wheelchair because of horrible wounds on his legs that would not heal.

But he had the best attitude ever. He managed to find the good in everything. I suggested a leg amputation, which would allow him to be fitted with a prosthesis and walk. He agreed, was walking within a month, and felt blessed simply because he could walk again.

I cannot go a day doing what I do without being grateful.

Are you a health-care professional whose interests go beyond the clinical? Are you a doctor with an unusual pastime? Get the word out by e-mailing Deborah J. Botti at [anybotti@hvc.rr.com](mailto:anybotti@hvc.rr.com).