



The Queen's Gaels Women's Hockey Team doing Development Ice with the girls

PROUD TO PLAY LIKE A GIRL

Girls' Hockey Skating Hard into the Future

By Lorraine Payette

Guts, determination and both eyes on the prize – these are the words that best define the Gananoque Girls' Hockey Association.

"Two years ago, we had only one midget team and just a President running the association," said Tracy Edwards, President of the Gananoque Girls Hockey Association. "We now have four teams and a hard working dedicated executive of 10 volunteers who are developing a constitution for the association based on the philosophy of fair play and establishing the association as a non-profit group."

It has been a long hard fight for girls and women to get out and play hockey.

"We would never have dreamed of it when I was a child," said Lois Creed, 91, of Dexter, NY. "Hockey and sports like it were for boys, and you didn't dare admit that it might be fun to play if you were a girl. When I got to college, they let us play women's field hockey, but even that wasn't encouraged."

Creed had come out to watch the girls break-in the ice when it opened in August. The gleam in her eye showed just how happy she was to see this change, and how she wished she could have been out there herself.

A house league association that plays from Gananoque to Napanee and up into Tamworth, the GGHA currently consists of

four teams – Novice girls from 6-8 years of age, Atoms from 11-12, Bantams 13-14, and Midgets 16-17.

Never get the idea that this is all about pink ponies and fluffy tutus, a sweet little novelty that will just go away as they grow out of it. This is hockey, played by the rules. It may not be as down and dirty as the Boys or Mixed Leagues can be, but it doesn't cheapen the experience any.

"When you think that three years ago we had one team of 15, to now four teams, that's a lot of growth," said Edwards. "Our novice team is full at 18, atom team is at 16, our bantam team is at 14 and our midgets are at 11. The younger ages are where most people start, so we're only going to keep growing. It's not a sport that people tend to start and then drop out. After all, there's an investment in the equipment, time and other things. It's also very team oriented. My eldest daughter graduated from the Royals two years ago when she left for university, and she literally played with the same basic team for eight years."

Case in point – six-year-old Lilly Read of Gananoque set foot in the arena for the first time in August, 2015. This delicate little wallflower was bound and determined that she was going to crack that ice, and not let it break her. Proudly wearing number 4 and having never skated before, she set forth with a will – one foot, then the other, stomp, drag, skid, stumble, crash, back up on the

feet, stomp, slide, slip, almost there, fall... She worked her way from one end of the ice to the other, caught her breath, and did it again and again and again.

Come November, Lilly was out and ready to play as number 5. As she joined the Development Ice you would have been hard put to believe it was still the same girl who had been off to a slow start in August. She was definitely on the fast track to earning the name "Tiger Lilly".

"The enthusiasm in the kids – you can definitely see it, but I will tell you the volunteers we have are just as enthusiastic, and eager, and that just trickles down to the kids," said Edwards. "The kids come off smiling, no matter what the results are. I see nothing, nothing, but happiness and a desire to go back out and keep working hard.

"Not only do we have 30 kids who come out on the ice every Monday morning to practice, we have probably, with those 30 kids, 15-25 parents (some people carpool, take turns, work, have appointments), but 15-25 parents sitting in the stands at 7:00 a.m. watching a practice. And they're just as eager watching a practice as they are watching a game. Then you have the coaches who are rearranging work schedules, trading shifts, so they can come out at 7:00 a.m. to practice with the girls. It's truly a community effort beyond anything I've ever experienced."

When it's all said and done, where can the GGHA lead? If you look at Kingston, you'll find the Queen's Gaels Women's Hockey Team out playing and making points right across university sports. If they're good enough, they can then go on and vie for positions in the Canadian Women's Hockey League.

"The Gananoque Girls Hockey Association Development Tournament invited every participant in the tournament – 16 teams – to join us with the Queen's Gaels for some Development Ice," said Edwards. "We host this development tournament hoping that it gives teams a chance to bond, look at skills, get some ideas of drills they could do on the ice. Seventy kids participated in this year's development ice starting with an hour for the novices and atoms, then another hour for the bantam and midget players to train with the Queen's Gaels."

In the end, it's worth every second, every dollar, every fall and every chance to get up and do it again. This is Canada and Canada's game, and these kids are more than happy to show the world what it means to play like a girl. LH



Marching in the Huck Finn parade



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How to play like a girl.

Lilly Read in November – new number, great style

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