

Little NHL organized hockey, access to the arena

Wheldon "Steamer" Emmerson was one of the original team members of the Little NHL initiated in Georgetown in late 1936 and to him, and his peers, the Little NHL meant the realization of some of their fondest dreams. Until the Little NHL was formed in the 1930's, there was no organized minor hockey for Georgetown youngsters. The Juniors and Intermediates had their clubs, but few local lads had the opportunity to get involved with an organized team.

He was 11-years-old at the time and Steamer recalls just what preceded the Little NHL.

"We played on frozen ponds, even marshes, where ice had formed," he said. "There were certain areas in town where certain groups of youngsters got together and in fact, when the Little NHL teams were being collected, these gangs pretty well stayed together."

"When I say gangs," Steamer pointed out, "I don't mean toughs or anything like that, just boys that stuck around together. Stewartown had their bunch, so did the Glen

and Norval."

"There were some boys who used to play on the golf course pond and there used to be a farm with a pond where Moore Park is located now and our crew came from there."

"It was unbelievable at first for us," he added "for the first time, we were given sweaters and allowed access to the arena. Where before we would just bang around the puck, now we were competing on an organized basis with coaches to teach us the game."

The men who began the Little NHL were something special, according to Steamer and Gordon Alcott was one in particular.

"He was a fine man. Firm but fair and I don't recall ever hearing him swear."

The times and the calibre of the men running the league made the strict rules adopted somewhat easier to take, he said.

"We heard nothing but encouragement for our efforts from the coaches and for the most part, the boys obeyed the rules without a

second thought."

"Don't forget," Steamer said, "the 1930's weren't the easiest of times and most youngsters learned responsibility at an early age. If you wanted to play, you obeyed the rules and that was that."

It's been 40 years since the inception of the Little NHL and times have changed. Now a majority of the Ontario Minor Hockey Associations belong to the provincial group, and Steamer feels priorities have changed.

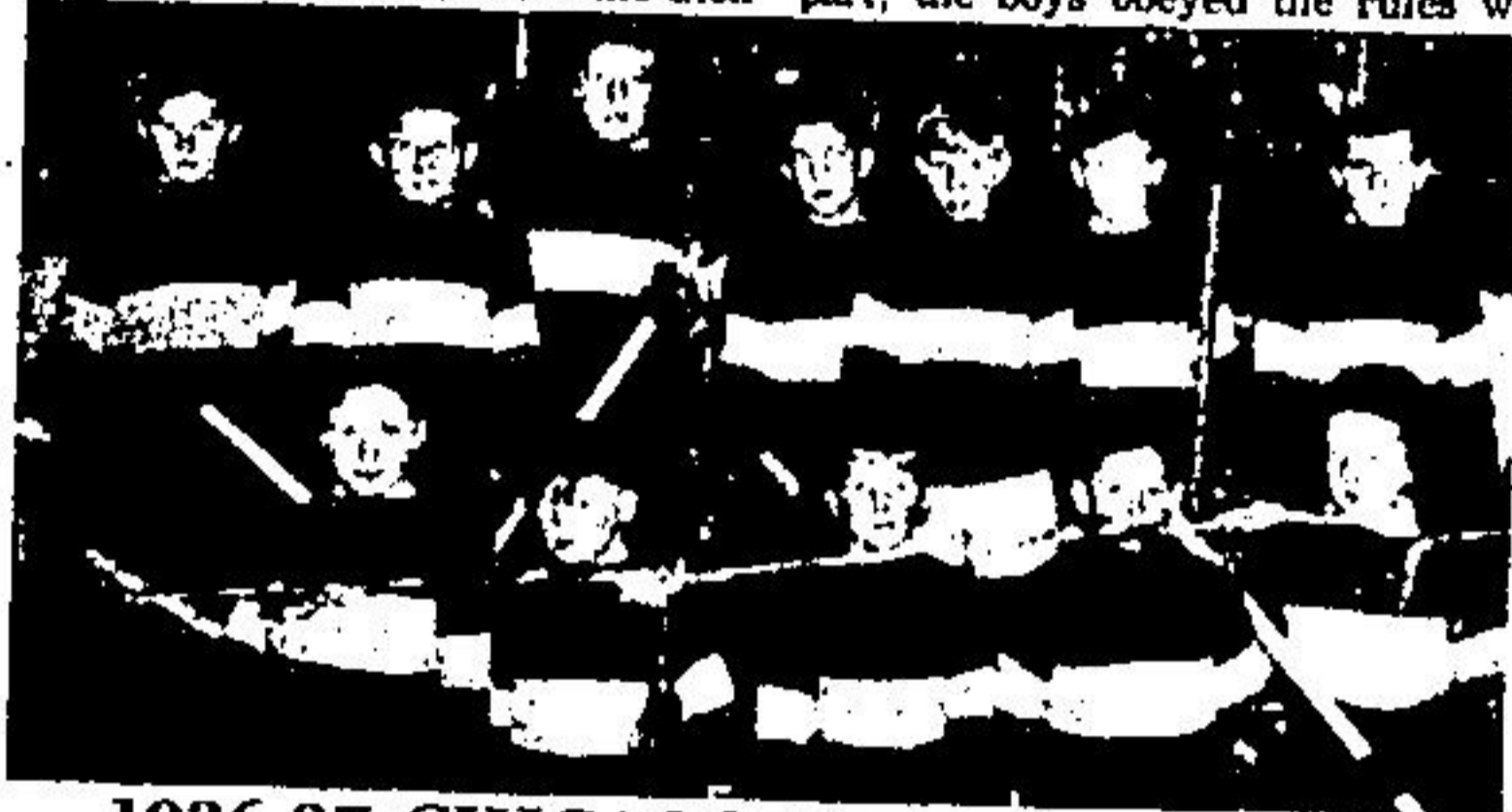
"I'm not being critical of the way things are run now," he stressed, "I'm just saying that things are different."

He feels that the concept of minor hockey has changed and that while the fun of the game is still there for the small fry, as the youngster goes up in the system there is more

and more pressure on him to excel. The Little NHL's basic philosophy was "love of the game" and the friendly spirit of competitiveness that went along with it. But now, Steamer said, a majority of young hockey players are being channelled through the system as pro hockey prospects.

"We never saw the stars play on television as youngsters do nowadays," he said. "Sure, every boy's dream was to play in the real NHL but merely participating was for us a real thrill."

"In my time, every boy who turned up to play regardless of ability. Now I think there's too much stress on winning. Perhaps it's for the better," Steamer said. "Who knows? I just know how much the Little NHL meant to me."



1936-37 CHICAGO BLACK HAWKS

Provincial Paper Mills sponsored the Chicago Black Hawks which featured goaltenders Bruce Gummer and Frank Connelly. Defence included John Keir and Eddie Stapleton. Walker Cleave and Ike Bullivant played centre while right wing was covered by Gord Lane and Bruce Collins. Dave Woods played left wing. Alternates included Joe Walker, John Collier and George Ferry.



1936-37 TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Original Toronto Maple Leafs. Front row, left to right: Bob Haddell, Don Early, Doug Sargent, Bob McKenzie, Richard Crichton and George Walker. Back row, left to right: Bernie Diggins, Norm Barber, Ralph Whitmee, Jack Morrow, Bud James and Charlie Hill.

Best Wishes to the Little N.H.L. on your 40th Anniversary Celebration

As a lifelong resident of Georgetown it was my privilege to witness the founding of the Little N.H.L. in 1936.

The founder, Gordon Alcott had two principles in mind: - To train youth in health building recreation and To Practice the self discipline so necessary for good citizenship in adult years. The success of his vision is attested by the fact the original six teams has grown to many hundreds, numbering over 40,000 players. Best wishes on this 40th Anniversary celebration.

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