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**More ice time for girls?**

By **FRANCES NIBLOCK**  
The New Tanner

Girls' hockey is clean, healthy, and hot. In Acton, the sport's skyrocketing popularity was evident all season as Acton girls suited up for House league, Rep and Halton Hills Girls Hockey Association games at the new arena.

The fledgling girls league had an unexpected 100 register its first year - 10 of those girls from Acton and

Rockwood. Like all women's teams they must compete for precious ice time, an issue on the table as Acton and Georgetown arena ice time is allocated for next season, and more communities like neighbouring Brampton re-vamp schedules to end male domination at community rinks

Across Canada registration in women's hockey has climbed 400 per cent since the first world championship in 1990 and in Ontario there

are 1,080 teams, from wobbly-ankled tots to seniors. The girls league played eight teams and drew huge appreciative crowds.

Why is women's hockey so hot? The men's game has been described a brute strength and ego while the women's games focuses on speed and skill, passing, shooting and skating.

Acton's Kathleen Bevan, a player with the Georgetown Senior "A" team and coach of two girls league teams, said the thrill of the game is different for every girl.

"Girls just like the sports as much as boys do. They like the game of hockey and it's a chance for them to play in a team environment, get some exercise, develop some skills and relationships," Bevan said.

"There's a cultural expectation for young boys to play hockey, but that hasn't happened for girls yet. It will, with role models like the national team that took silver in Nagano."

Abby Lyons, 8, of Acton, played House league hockey for a year and joined the League champion Acton Novice II Sabres Rep team two years ago.

"I really like skating, but the best part is being part of a team," Abby said recently. Mom Julie Lyons supports the new all-girl league but will let Abby decide where she wants to play.

"Abby really likes playing with the boys - they treat her like any other player. At first she didn't want to play because to her, it was a boys' sport, but then she saw a team play with some boys that she knew from lacrosse and she joined up and loves it."

Acton's Amanda Schroeder, 11, plays for the Atom House league Georgetown Chrysler team and the all-girl Brampton Canettes, laced up three years ago.

"I tried out for a House league team because ago my brother said I should. Every year I got better, so I kept playing and now I like playing on both teams," Anderson said.

Acton's Dawn Stevenson, a member of the Freckled Lions, the first champions of the Girls Association, didn't enjoy playing on a mixed team.

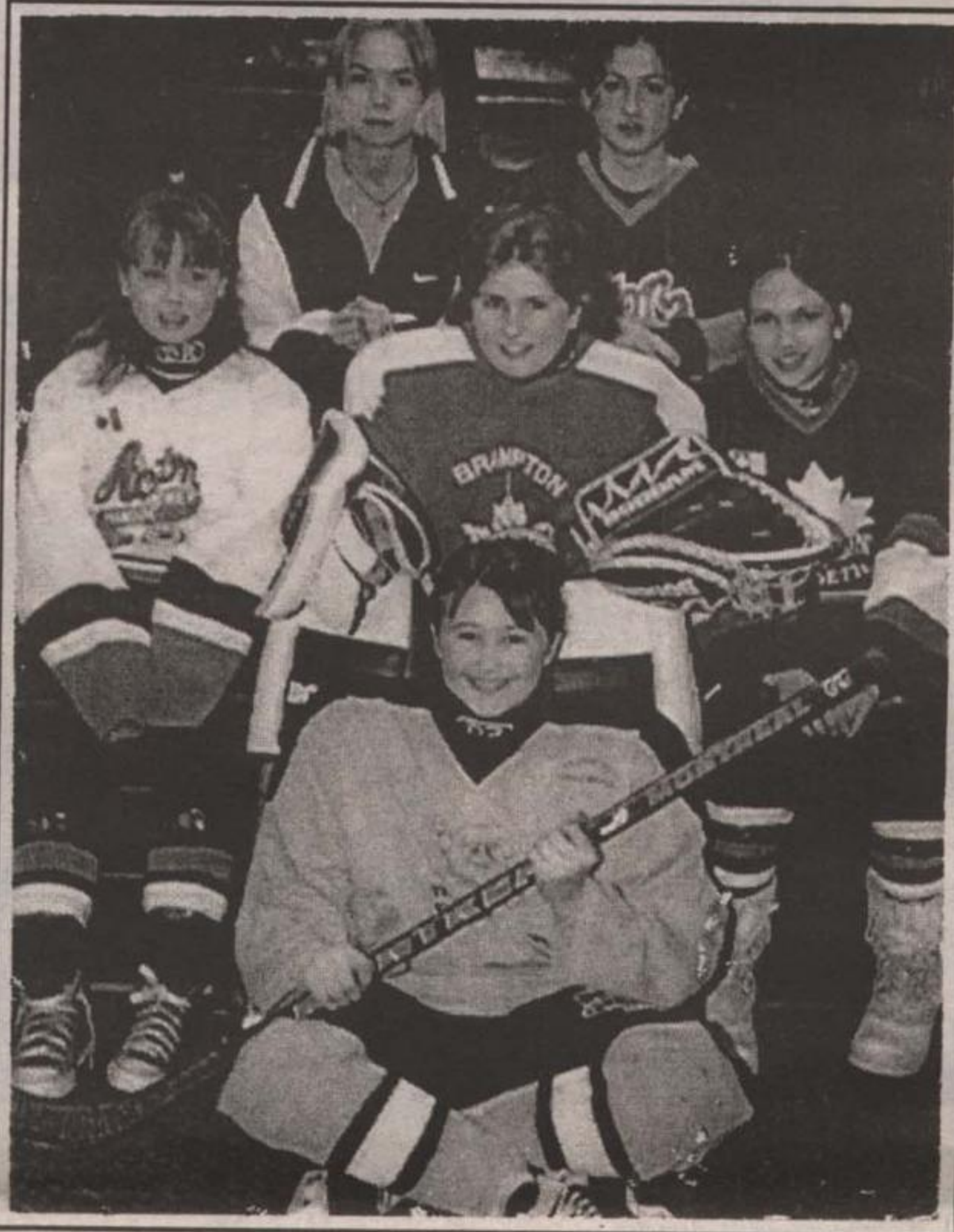
"I played three years in House league and nobody treated me like part of the team because I was a girl," Stevenson said. "I had to change in a different room - nobody talked to me the whole year so I switched to the girls' league and it's a lot better socially."

Melody Edwards, 10, of Acton, plays for Allostra Catering, the come-from-behind underdog Atom champs. She used to tag along to games with her Dad and coach.

"Hockey is a lot of fun. If you're not friends with anybody you won't win many games, but if you're working as a team, you'll win most of your games," Edwards said.

Dad Paul Edwards said he doesn't care where girls play

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**WHOLESONE, HOT HOCKEY:** These Acton and area hockey players are part of the explosion in women's hockey, a game that focuses on speed and skill. Front: Kathryn Chandler, Middle, left to right: Abby Lyons, Candice Anderson, Amanda Schroeder. Back: Lacy Kernohan, Rebecca Marcoux. - Frances Niblock photo

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