

# Knowles not holding her breath for local girls hockey program

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

Miltonian Helen Knowles would like nothing better than to see a girls hockey program established locally.

But at the same time, she's not holding her breath.

"Until this town really starts growing, I don't think you'll see it (girls hockey). Not with such strong centres so close by," said the veteran member of the NWHL's Mississauga Ice Bears. "If I had a daughter going out for hockey, I'd probably make the effort to drive her to an established centre too."

But Knowles was only too happy to bring top-flight female hockey to town this past weekend. In front of a near capacity crowd at Memorial Arena Saturday night, her Ice Bears delighted fans young and old by thrashing Le Mistral de Laval 9-1 in a sanctioned league game.

Milton's 30-year-old centre — who's been thriving under a new coaching staff that was put in place last month — scored once and drew two assists in the blowout victory.

Said Knowles, "Even though we blew them away, the game was very well received. We



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

**Helen Knowles of the Mississauga Ice Bears would love to see a girls hockey program established locally, but admits that probably won't happen until growth sets in.**

gave the fans a bit of everything, including two fights which is quite rare in a non-

contact league like this." The win kept Mississauga firmly entrenched in third place

in the NWHL's Western Conference.

Knowles has been with the team for seven seasons and got her start in hockey more than two decades ago — as the first female player to ever compete in Acton.

"Two or three other girls joined after that, but they kicked us out after pee-wee," she recalled.

Since then she's seen female hockey grow in both numbers and respectability — to the point where the NWHL could go pro following the next winter Olympics.

But Mississauga's Ice Bears — regardless of their status — still fall far short in the attendance department when it comes to their co-tenants at the Hershey Centre.

And while many might suggest that has to do with the contact element of men's hockey, Knowles disagrees.

"I'm a bit of a goon, so switching to contact would be a benefit to me, but most people follow women's hockey because it's non-contact and there's more skill involved," she said.

"If you took out the contact, we'd probably give the Merchants and other teams in that league a pretty good run."

# Merchants will receive \$1,600 from Capitals' game walk-out

The Merchants have scored more than just a forfeit victory from a recently cancelled home-ice game against Brampton.

Milton will receive \$1,600 (for costs incurred) from the Capitals — whose players staged a last-minute walk-out on January 16 in support of assistant coach Pete Gout, who left the team over a monetary dispute.

The Ontario Hockey Association (OHA) also fined Brampton \$5,000 and suspended each of its players for two games — with suspensions able to be spread out in six-player installments.

Capitals John Winstanley and Vito Montesano — who was out with a concussion and who arrived late for the game — are the only two players exempt from suspensions.

Merchant general manager Nick Slawson seems satisfied with the OHA ruling,



which was handed down by OHA president Brent Ladds January 22.

"I don't think it overly punishes Brampton, but I think it's fair," he said Friday.

"I haven't seen anything like this before and I can't see anything subsequent to this happening. This (ruling) is just the minimum punishment and should send a strong deterrent to other clubs."

The late-season walk-out essentially took Brampton out of the running for first place in the Ontario Provincial Jr. A League's Western Conference.

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