

Outdoor rink offers chance to rekindle the on-ice magic

I've found a little outdoor rink in Milton.

It has boards, lights, the ice is fairly smooth, and it appears to be maintained by the town.

Sorry, but I'm not telling you where it is. Call me selfish, but if I told you and then you told someone else, and they told someone else, the rink would be packed with people.

Not that I would mind that, during the pleasure skating times, but I have my own agenda. I want to try playing hockey again.

I haven't played for about 15 years — haven't even been on the ice except for the odd practice or two.

I used to play on two teams a season, and at least one during the summer. But the time constraints of parenthood and the fact that I was spending several nights a week working at NHL games meant something had to go.

I don't regret that. The responsibilities and privilege of being a single parent dwarf most pleasure activities in terms of importance and desire.

I've had plenty of offers from people who rent ice, both here in Milton and other places, but I don't go. It's not that I don't want to, but rather that I can't bring myself to do it because it's been so long.

I used to be a decent hockey player. I've played with players, on my team and on opposing teams, who also played Major Junior, Tier 2 Junior, U.S. college hockey, European hockey and even in the



Out in left field

with MURRAY TOWNSEND

NHL.

In midget hockey, for example, I always remembered the name of this one player who scored five goals against us in the Toronto area finals. Paul Gardner went on to have a pretty good career in the NHL.

And hey, in my greatest individual hockey achievement, I once scored six goals in a game.

But anyway, it's difficult to go and do something that you were once good at and aren't anymore. It's not so much that I'm afraid of embarrassing myself, but rather that I would look at myself and see that I'm not very good anymore. It's not that I could even think I'm doing okay for somebody my age. If I had kept playing all along I could say that, but not now.

It's different from when I played football with the Milton Marauders last year. I had never played before, so whatever I was able to do I thought was okay, considering my age.

Oh, I knew I could have been better 20 years ago, or even 10, but I didn't have anything concrete to make that comparison.

I remember playing hockey competitively. I remember sitting in the dressing room, which became quiet right before game time as everyone sunk into their own thoughts. The butterflies from nervous excitement waiting for the Zamboni, which seemed to take forever to finish its task. The tiny moment of pleasure when stepping onto the freshly-cleaned ice and taking your first lap around your side of the rink.

And the sudden elation of scoring a goal. There aren't many better feelings than that, no matter how many you've scored and no matter how you score them.

Most of all, it's just playing that I miss. Before, during and after the games.

I was almost always the first player to arrive because I couldn't wait to get there, and almost always the last to go because I didn't want to leave.

These are things you don't forget, and sometimes when you think they'll always be just memories, you stand on the edge of an outdoor rink and you start thinking maybe you can do them again. I wouldn't mind playing in an old-timer's league, if I could at least perform at a reasonable level.

I've dug out my skates, a puck and an old hockey stick, and one of these days or nights when nobody is around, I'll go to the little outdoor rink that I found and see if there's anything left.

Front-end trips do the trick in Snowshoe Series qualifiers

Both Raider Rain and Pick A Trail proved that the front-end was the place to be during a pair of \$16,000 second leg divisions of the Snowshoe Series Friday evening at Woodbine Race Track.

Raider Rain and Chris Christoforou got to the lead early and made it look easy, going gate-to-wire in 1:58 during the opening dash.

PH Tidal Wave and driver Phil Hudon had a pocket ride through :28.4, :59.3 and 1:28 fractions, but couldn't convert the trip — finishing three-quarters of a length back in second.

Retrospect, in rein to Keith Oliver and first up the backstretch, delivered a strong finish to place third, one length in arrears. Victorious in the first leg, Jackie Brown — with Luc Ouellette at the controls — finished fourth.

With Randy Waples at the helm, Pick A Trail got up in the closing strides to get the better of Tyberboy and driver Mario Baillargeon in 1:57.1 in the second showdown.

Tyberboy set fractions of :28.4, :58.4 and 1:28.1, but with Pick A Trail parked first-over in second since the three-quarters pole, the pace-setter was overtaken by a



Hoof Beat

with JEFF RENTON

quarter-length at the wire.

Post-time favourite Genghis Pan — who won a division of the first leg — sat fourth through the majority of the mile and had to steer wide to clear a breaking Nojoke Kiev at the third station.

Coming on in the late stages, Genghis Pan finished third — one length back.

Trained by Robbie McNeill, Pick A Trail — a Prince Lee Acres homebred — recorded his first victory of 2004 Friday.

The \$52,800 final of the Snowshoe Series is slated for Friday.

Old Friends slo-pitch set to expand

Back by popular demand, the Milton Old Friends slo-pitch league is set to welcome two new teams into this year's fold.

That means 30 new spaces are open within the men's 50-and-over league, which will include six squads this coming season.

Started last summer, the Milton

Old Friends loop was created because a number of players had dropped out of the Milton Men's Slo-Pitch League — citing such reasons as an inability to compete with the younger players and problems associated with playing under the lights during late-night games.

Registration for the 50-plus

league will be held this Saturday and next from 12 to 4 p.m. at The Millside Restaurant, located at the corner of Main and Martin streets.

For more information, call Doug Leal at (905) 878-7431, or drop by Mike's Barber Shop for a sign-up sheet.

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