

The ESSEX FREE PRESS SPORTS

Girls' hockey comes into a league of its own

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

The Essex District High School girls' hockey team is experiencing the game in an entirely new way, said club manager Margaret Malenfant-Bosse.

This season, local girls' hockey officially became a WECSSAA-sanctioned school sport, which Malenfant-Bosse calls "a major breakthrough" for the game.

"This is exciting and more organized - it's an official league now," she said. "We can compete for SWOSSAA and OFSSA now, which is the first year the girls have had that opportunity and that's what makes it such a major year."

Malenfant-Bosse, who's managed the team for the past four seasons, said previously the Essex club combined players with



JEN KONING

girls from Sandwich High School to form a team.

As interest among local schools grew, a group of coaches was able to raise 11 teams from Windsor and Essex County to form an official, no-contact league.

Now, EDHS has its 18-player team and will compete in a 10-game season against local schools of all

sizes. During the playoffs, teams will be arranged into population-appropriate tiers.

"It's becoming stronger and stronger," Malenfant-Bosse said of high school girls' hockey. "This is a big event for us this year."

So far, EDHS has played two games - beating Sandwich 5-4 and losing to



SARAH DIERICKSE

Massey 3-2.

The team also competed in a tournament hosted by Belle River High School last month.

"There is talent on our team," Malenfant-Bosse said. "That's including the brand new rookie players. The thing that impressed me the most about our girls is their stamina. The game



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in Sandwich, we were losing the first two periods and for them to come back and score four goals in the final period with nine minutes left, it shows they just don't quit. They've got a lot of drive and enthusiasm."

Malenfant-Bosse said one thing she's noticed in the four years she's managed the club is that players are bringing more experience to the team.

"The first year they started some of them didn't know positions, we were telling them almost how to put their equipment on," she said. "Now, it seems like as the girls come in, the younger generation already have hockey experience."

Malenfant-Bosse said the coaching staff, made up of her husband Mark as head coach and her son Michael as trainer, try to mix up the lines so experi-

enced girls are playing with rookies.

"They play very well together. There's absolutely no contention between the girls," Malenfant-Bosse said. "They treat each other really well and pick each other's spirits up."

Grade 9 player Jen Koning said coming into the league as a younger player can be a little intimidating.

"It's more competitive and we're playing against older players," said Koning, who plays defence.

Sarah Dierickse, a ninth-grade right-winger, said the tougher competition helps younger players to improve.

"You go from playing house league to travel and it's a lot more competitive with more skating," she said. "And you get to improve because of it."

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