

Girls hockey grows in popularity

**Claremont Men's Slo-Pitch League
 will be holding their
 first general meeting and
 registration at the
 Claremont Community Hall**

**at
 1:00 pm Sunday March 25th
 New Players Welcome**

**For more information contact Frank Hill
 649-2653 or Garry Stiner 649-2714**

**BRUCE STAPLEY
 Correspondent**

In an age where sport has become, at many levels, a win-at-all-costs obsession with both participants and fans showing what lies just beneath the thin veneer of civilization, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Girls' Hockey Association is truly a breath of fresh air.

The WSGHA, started by Stouffville's prolific sports pioneer Cliff Dunkeld in the mid-1970s, has experienced a resurgence the past few years after going through a doldrums stage.

When Dunkeld and fellow builder Al Piette passed the torch to Steve Upton and John Summerhill last

spring, the two elder statesmen of girls' hockey could look back with satisfaction on the success of the operation.

The Atom house league, consisting of four teams, had concluded a solid season with an overtime championship thriller.

A select squad from the house league had been Ontario Women's Hockey League provincial finalists, as had Ted Lowery's Senior D ladies outfit. The Senior C women's crew were eliminated in the all-Ontario semifinals.

This year, the Atoms have become Juniors, with the Angies Eatery Pee Wee rep team once again serving as the flagship of the girls program.

Things thin out a little in terms of

quantity as you work your way upwards, but what's there is choice. The Intermediate girls compete with a team from Sutton each week, and the two Senior ladies squads have been making noise at various tournaments this season.

Upton and Summerhill, who serve as WSGHA President and Vice President, respectively, are hoping to see the program grow with the current Junior set-up becoming the rule since it features a strong house league and a competitive all-star team.

"Our is the only ice hockey program for girls in York Region," said Summerhill. "We are currently drawing from 10 to 15 per cent of our players from outside towns like Claremont, Goodwood and Newmarket."

"We must get the word out to girls right here in Stouffville that there is girls' hockey for them to get involved in."

With women's hockey gaining momentum world-wide, to the point where it will be a demonstration sport in the 1996 Winter Olympics, Upton feels his program is producing many candidates for top level teams.

"We have six or seven girls with our Angies Pee Wee team who will be able to compete with the best," he said. "And they are all mostly first year Pee Wees, with only two of them leaving next season, so they should be strong. Then there's all the talent on the Senior teams."

The Pee Wees will be entered in the North Metro Women's League for the 1990-91 campaign, said Upton.

But that will leave a shortage in the house league, as the girls won't be able to play both regular and rep hockey as they have this year.

"We'll need another 20 to 25 players to register with us next year, mostly at the eight to 12-year age level," said Summerhill. "We foresee a little problem in carrying girls hockey forward. We would like to have a four team Intermediate house league, and the Sutton girls will probably join up with us, which will help."

But we need to let the girls who are playing with the boys in the Stouffville hockey schools and Novice program know that there is a place for them to go.

Summerhill said he is forever hearing from parents who didn't know that Stouffville had a hockey program for girls, and that his association's biggest task is getting the word out.

Once on board, the parents are extremely supportive, he said. "I've found the attitudes of the parents towards their girls playing hockey to be better than towards boys. The win-at-all-costs approach isn't there for one thing. The pressure of the kids aspiring to go to the National Hockey League is also missing."

Summerhill maintained the girls' parents have a better perspective when it comes to the competitive aspect of the game.

"They know it's important to their kids to win, but they also applaud the other team's players. The parents are very well behaved at the games, and they are always involved."

Both Summerhill and Upton act as referees at the house league level, as a cost cutting measure, and they say that despite some good-natured ribbing, they don't take the abuse often hurled at the men in the striped shirts.

The girls program does have a cost advantage, said Upton, with the WSGHA house league fees being about 40 per cent less than those charged by the boys organization.

So as the house league teams wind up their season, and the girls rep squads chase after their respective provincial crowns, the WSGHA would appear to have established itself in a town known for its solid hockey tradition.

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