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A vintage year for local girls hockey

The Stouffville-Markham Girls Hockey Association is the toast of Ontario.

With an unprecedented three Ontario Women's Hockey Association gold medals at the recent provincial finals in Brampton, the well-run local amalgamation was matched only by highly populated Mississauga, which also iced a trio of titles.

Throw in a pair of golds, a silver and two bronze medals at this year's North Metro League playoff championships for the eight SMGHA rep level entries and you have an organization that is surely enjoying its salad days.

Dave Bean, a coach who followed up last year's OWHA gold with the SMGHA novice BB Stars with a championship for this year's atom BB Stars, insists the triple trick in Brampton is no mean feat.

THREE GOLDS

"It really is incredible for an organization the size of ours with 300 girls to come away with three golds up against centres like Scarborough, Mississauga and Brampton who have upwards of 1,000 kids," he said.

The credit, he said, belongs to the players for their disciplined efforts, but also to veteran SMGHA president Dianne White.

"She runs a heck of a program. I can't believe the time she puts in behind the scenes that nobody even knows about."

Bean's feelings are echoed by Charles Giliberto, who coached the pee wee A Stars to OWHA gold this spring.

"The success (three golds) is a tribute to the organization and to Dianne White," said Giliberto, who last season coached the pee wee BB Stars team that won their North Metro League playoff title.

"If every organization had a person like that at the top they'd all be winners."

As for White, who, as always, stretched herself to the limit trying to watch all the games played by the six Stars teams at the OWHA finals, she was on top of the world with the SMGHA breakthrough in Brampton.

"I'm flabbergasted. I guess we're doing something right."

She suggested the extra ice time afforded by the second pad at the rec centre played a key role in the success.

Rob Hurlburt, whose midget B Stars followed up a so-so 1998-99 season by putting it all together at the provincials this time around, said his team's title victory is a tribute to the players' desire to remain committed in the face of the ever-increasing distractions of the teen years.

"The nucleus of this team has been together for six or seven years," he said. "It's a tough age at 16-17 years old. Do they play hockey or do they work or do other things?"



Bruce Stapley

He said the players rode sheer desire to victory in Brampton, where they got an overtime goal from Mandy Vandenberg to defeat Peterborough 1-0 in the championship game.

"They really wanted it. They dug down and gave it a little extra."

All three coaches refused to single out players who stood out among the rest.

"You're only as strong as your weakest players," noted Hurlburt.

Bean said his atom BB Stars bought into the fact early in the season that they had to keep the puck from going into their own net if they were going to pick up where his novice BB Stars provincial champions left off last season.

"At the beginning we didn't think we had the same intensity or talent as last year," Bean said. "But with a complete defensive effort and with our goalie (Cassandra McNichol) standing on her head we managed to win."

STRESS DEFENCE

Giliberto, whose pee wee A Stars gave up a mere four goals in six games in Brampton, took the same tack.

"Games are usually low scoring in girls hockey so we stressed defence all season."

While girls hockey continues to grow, a shortage of teams can make it hard for the better teams to find sufficient challenges during the regular season.

North Metro League divisions are made up of teams of different ability levels, although every attempt is made to ensure all teams play in the proper category for the provincial tournament.

"There's still not enough girls teams yet for consistent competition," Hurlburt said.

Fortunately for his team, this year's league midget division had nine teams, five of which were ranked at the same B level as his Stars.

But while league play can offer some easy games, the emphasis on parity at the provincial level makes for a real showdown at the championship tournament, said Hurlburt.

"At the provincials they really try to teams playing at the same level so it's very competitive."

The three title-winning Stars teams were obviously able to rise to the challenge.

Bantam Raiders seeking extra players for the gridiron

The Markham Raiders bantam football team are still looking for a few players to audition for this year's squad.

Anyone interested in auditioning must have been born in 1984 and 1985 with no weight restrictions.



must weigh no more than 165 pounds. Anyone born June 1, 1983 to Dec. 31 can be unlimited in weight.

Practices are held Tuesdays at the Brother Andre Catholic High School gym starting at 8:15 p.m. and Thursdays outdoors at Springdale Park starting at 6:30 p.m.

For further information, call Jim Bruce at 201-8763.

Those born Jan. 1, 1983 to May 31