DID YOU KNOW: Ice time tough to get in early '70s

Stouffville pioneered in female hockey circles

BY SANDRA BOLAN

sbolan@yrmg.com

In the early 1970s, there weren't a lot of options for young girls who wanted to play hockey.

Locally, three girls wanted to play so badly they convinced their parents to drive them to Markham for their 10 to 11 p.m. mid-week ice time.

One parent, Cliff Dunkeld, who did his share of the carpooling, got the bright idea to start a girls hockey league in Stouffville.

"We had one problem. The (male) hockey association didn't think females should play hockey. So we had a problem, it looked like, getting ice time," he said.

But a call to Fran Rider, the president of girls hockey in the area at the time, helped, a bit.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Girls Hockey Association was given two choices -Saturdays or Sundays from 5-to 11 p.m.

"Back in those days, Saturday night was date night and the stores were all open down here" on Main Street, where some of the girls worked, Mr. Dunkeld said.

So Sunday evening practices and games it was.

The pioneering league started in the 1974-75 season with 64 players aged 12 to 20 divided amongst six teams.

In the 1970s, there were teams and some leagues scattered throughout the province, including Brampton, Mississauga, Sterling, Preston, Kingston, Ottawa,

Etobicoke, Don Mills, Ajax and Uxbridge.

"You'd have to travel a long way for a one-hour game," said Ms Rider, nowpresident of the Ontario Women's Hockey Association.

In 1979, according to Ms Rider, there were 72 teams. In 2010, there were 2,543 girls hockey teams in Ontario.

Registration in Stouffville during the first year was \$20.

"Now, that doesn't hardly buy you skate laces," Mr. Dunkeld said.

"Some of them could hardly skate, but they wanted to play so badly," added Joanne Steel, the league's first president.

Although some people didn't think girls should be playing, "we had such good support from the parents. Everybody came out and did anything to support the kids."

All of the coaches at the time were male. However, each team also had a house mother who helped the girls get suited up. Once the players were dressed, the coaches were allowed in the dressing room.

In the early 1980s, Mr. Dunkeld and Ms Steel stepped away from the organization.

"There was no reason why we left. No bad feelings. It was time to move on, do something different." Ms Steel said.

Dianne White took over as president.

For reasons unknown, in 1986, only two house league teams remained and were comprised primarily of girls who played in the league's inaugural season.

Mr. Dunkeld assisted the association in recruiting more players, which proved successful as 24 girls registered for the next season. The following year, the number of players grew enough to ice four house league teams. A select team was also formed for tournaments.

In 1990, the house league expanded to two divisions, junior and senior, and the peewee rep team won the Brampton Canadettes Tournament.

Two weeks later, the same team brought home the provincial title. Several Ontario championship banners now hang at the Stouffville Arena.

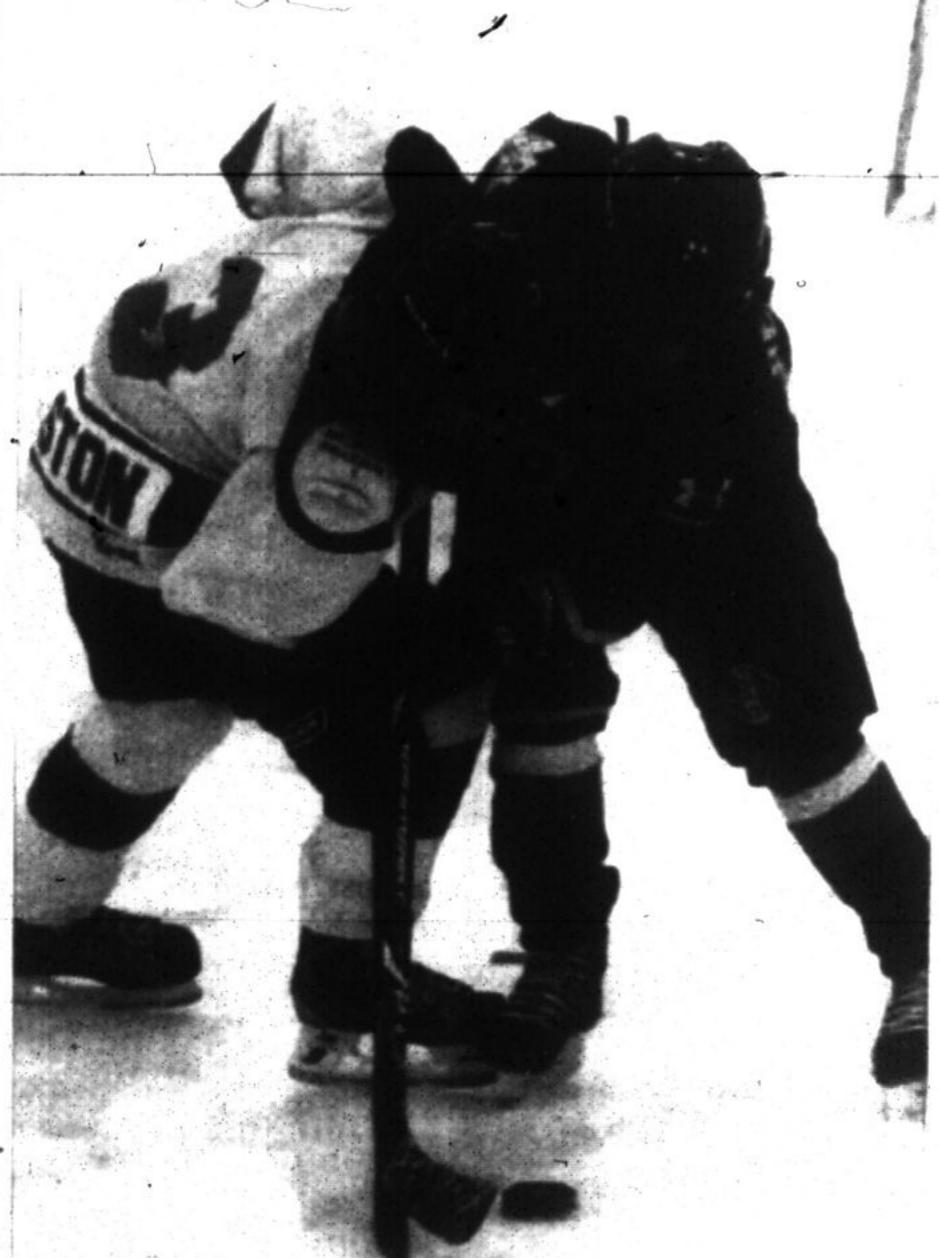
By 1993, the league had 125 members playing on eight house league teams and three competitive teams, who were a part of the North Metro Girls Hockey League.

In the mid-1990s a partnership was forged with Markham because so many girls from there wanted to play in Stouffville, according to Ms White.

However, in order to accommodate all of the players, the ice time was split between Markham and Stouffville arenas.

Around 1998, the popular league changed its name to the Stouffville Markham Girls Hockey Association.

Among the league's alumni are Gillian Apps, who played with Team Canada and the Brampton Canadette Thunder and Elizabeth Knox, who is a goalie for the Wilfrid Laurier University squad. Ms Knox is playing at the world university games in Europe this month.



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Girls hockey dates back to the early 1970s in Stouffville, when few Ontario centres offered the sport to females.



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