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It's All In The Game

Ringette scores with Stouffville resident

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville Free Press

The first-ever ringette game was played in the winter of 1965 in the northern Ontario town of Espanola.

It was created by Sam Jacks, who was then director of parks and recreation in North Bay and wanted to develop an on-ice game for girls and women. Today ringette is played across Canada and in six countries around the world, and Stouffville's Britt Kleine is one of its fiercest proponents.

The 27-year-old, who is currently taking her master's degree in sports management at Drexel University, Philadelphia, also owns the Markham Summer Ringette League (MSRL). For the past seven years MSRL has attracted players aged 16 and up from across the GTA and now she wants to expand the game's reach to a younger cohort.

"For summer 2014 I plan to also introduce a ringette camp for our younger players and it will be held in either Stouffville or Markham," said Britt, who started playing when she was six years old.

"I was a tad reluctant to try ringette as I had never skated before and was easily intimidated by most social settings, but nonetheless with the support of my family I got on the ice. I cried the entire time," she recalled. However, as her confidence grew with the help of dedicated coaching, she began to develop a passion for the game, along with an appreciation of the lasting benefits that resulted from her involvement.

"The only time I ever cried at ringette again was when we lost at a championship game. Now in my Philadelphia apartment, my Bears jersey hangs in my closet as a constant reminder of the friends and incredible memories Markham Ringette provided me over the last 20 years."

Looking back, she credits the game for giving her the strength to stand up to the school bullies who tormented her in both elementary and high school.

"Ringette not only provided me with an alternate social setting and a different group of peers to befriend year after year, but it instilled in me values that I am certain I would have had difficulty learning if it were not for ringette," she said.

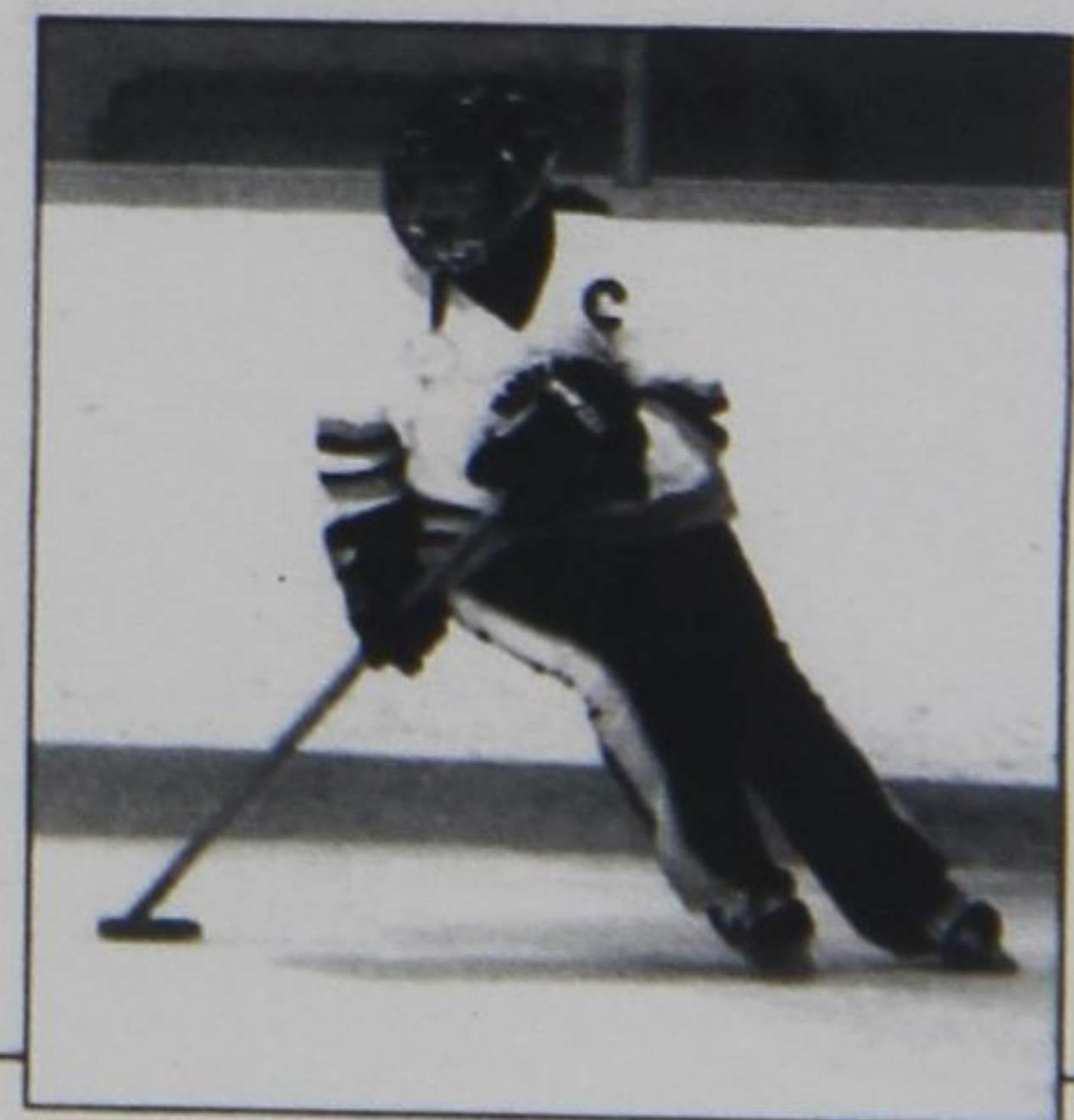
"I learned what it meant to work as a team, I learned how to problem solve and think on my feet, and most importantly I learned the value that each individual player brought to the team." Despite her wobbly start, "now I can get up in front of a crowd of hundreds, take the microphone and give an impromptu speech without hesitation."

Britt has played hockey and numerous other sports, "but something about ringette and the 'girl power' feeling it gives just made it extra special for me." Her heart will always belong to the Markham Ringette Association, she said.

"They understand the value of the sport and how important it is to provide the opportunity for young girls in and around Markham to play. Markham's recent push to expand ringette's player base and bring in girls who might never have considered ringette is really remarkable."

Britt is glad that she persevered with the sport that has given her so much and she hopes her experience will encourage others to try it out. "If I could give any parents or young players one piece of advice it would be to just try ringette."

For more information visit www.msrl.ca.



Stouffville



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