

Girls Rate Hockey a Good Skate

By Ed McGonagle

A poster at the Tyson's Corner skating rink reads: "Ice Hockey is for the Girls—All Girls Welcome—No Experience Necessary."

Your average male hockey fan might imagine a toothless, stitch-scarred amazon streaking across the ice with stick raised, crashing an opposition player into the boards or dropping stick and gloves to settle a personal score—slugging, pulling hair. Not so.

Women indeed do play hockey, but with none of the violence and brutality that characterizes the men's professional game.

Women's hockey began here last year when figure skater Cindy Husted, a student at American University, was managing the concession stand at the Tysons' Corner rink. As she explains it:

"Between skating sessions all the male employees used to play hockey and they were having so much fun I decided to join in. I really got into it and pretty soon other girls were out on the ice too. Art Patton, who runs the rink, got sticks, pucks, and equipment for us and before long we had our own ice time.

"The problem then was to get enough girls out to pay for the ice time and so we had to start recruiting. We ran a few newspaper ads and the word got around. This year we contacted the local high schools and colleges and several girls have come out. We have women as young as 15 and as old as 45."

The women practice for 1½ hours every Sunday evening starting at 10:15 at Tysons' Corner. Their season began in mid-October and runs through the end of March.

The program took a step forward recently when Steve Donahue signed on as coach. Donahue, an excellent player who is a student at AU, said he "saw a poster at AU and contacted one of the girls to see if they had a coach. When she said they didn't, I offered my services. It's worked out great."

Practice sessions for the 14 or so women who regularly show up begin with skating drills followed by shooting practice on the goaltenders. Then it's back to skating and conditioning, with passing drills thrown in. The women skate in threes the length of the rink, passing the puck back and forth as in a game situation.

Scrimmages cap off the sessions.

The women's style of play is much like that of their male counterparts, but the skaters are not quite as fast, nor are their shots as hard.

Bodychecking, which makes the men's game so rough, is permitted but discouraged at this early stage of development. As it is, when two women collide on the ice they are apt to say "excuse me" or "sorry"—words rarely heard from the men.

Russ McCurdy, coach of the women's team at Yale which plays a 15-game schedule against other women's teams, describes his players as "logical and very coachable."

"Many of the girls I coach are playing hockey for the first time and so they have no bad habits to break. They are determined and inspired players. I think they have better stamina than men players."

Most of the Washington area players began as figure skaters and through a variety of circumstances ended up playing hockey.

Sue Hardesty, who works for a lobby on nuclear disarmament, traded in her figure skates for hockey skates when she had trouble keeping up with her husband while skating on the Mall.

"I first played during the summer with my husband and a group of his friends. Some of them treated me like a fragile piece of china while others treated me like just another player. It was kind of confusing, but most of them were pleased to see a girl out there trying."

Sue Spring is a microbiologist at the National Institutes of Health. She became interested in hockey in Chicago, where she grew up.

"I was a hockey freak," she recalls.

"I really liked watching Bobby Hull. When I came here and saw an ad about girls' hockey I decided to try it, as long as the girls weren't built like football players. It turned out they weren't so I stuck with it. It's been really great."

Rosemary Warren grew up outside Boston, where it seems everyone plays ice hockey. She played pond hockey as a youngster and became an avid Bruins' fan. She came to Washington as a legislative researcher, thinking she had left hockey behind her.

"I skated a lot down here but I found skating around in a big circle at public skating sessions boring. When I saw the newspaper ad for girls' hockey I came out. It's great exercise."

Pam Lavery, a sophomore at Prince George's Community College, is one of the few women in the Washington

area ever to strap on goalie pads.

Her hockey career began three years ago at the Tucker Road Ice Rink near her home in Oxon Hill. She worked there as a skate guard and played hockey with the men between sessions.

"When we played pickup games they never knew where to put me so they stuck me in the goal. I got to like playing there and after awhile bought my own equipment.

"The boys used to test me to see how good I was and if I was afraid. I think I surprised them."

Lavery's worst mistake was taking off her face mask one day because it was bothering her vision. She got hit in the forehead by a shot and was hospitalized for a week with a fractured skull.

To her parents' relief she was close to giving it up after that, but then she learned of the sessions at Tysons' Corner and was back in the crease.

Her hope now is to generate interest in girls' hockey at the Tucker Road rink this winter. She wants to play closer to home.

It is possible that some day each skating rink in the Washington area will organize its own women's hockey group. An all-women's league could evolve.

Reports that women's teams have started up in Charlottesville and Norfolk are encouraging, but for now the Tysons' Corner group is sticking to developing skills and an occasional game with local competition.

Their first game is scheduled for the end of November, when they will take on a team of 12- to 14-year-olds—the Capital Boys Club Pewees.