Northern Exposure

Slowly but surely, hockey’s popularity in NorCal continues to grow

High-scoring Valencia trio heats up in WSHL
Inside...

CJ Angeles, pictured with her brother and coach, Patrick, is making a name for herself with LA Hockey Club (see story on Page 21).

On the cover:
Main Photo: San Jose Jr. Sharks U18 AAA
defenseman Dan Senkbeil, was recently recognized by NHL Central Scouting. Photo/Dansenk Photography

Insert Photo: From left, Valencia Flyers' Brian Voogt, Andrew Moresi and Daniel Chang, make up one of the top lines in the WSHL. Photo/Daniel Belis
By Sonia Tydingco

Twice a year, the Northern California Women’s Hockey League coordinates a revolutionary event to encourage women to try something they haven’t tried before: ice hockey.

The NCWHL hosted its semi-annual event, “Give Hockey A Try Day,” over the summer at Belmont Iceland with a steady turnout of 34 participants (32 skaters and two goalies).

At GHATD, women 18 and older are given the opportunity to learn how to play hockey with no experience or equipment necessary. The NCWHL provides all the gear and on-ice instruction to prepare the participants for an end-of-session scrimmage.

“This league in particular is very novice-friendly,” said Ellen Woods, a five-year NCWHL member. “Some seasons we had skaters who had never skated before and they showed great improvement.”

The schedule for GHATD consists of about 20 minutes of basic skating drills (forward strides, stopping and getting up), 20 minutes of puck-handling drills (stationary passing, skating with the puck and passing while skating) and 40 minutes of scrimmage with a referee, an on-ice coach and two bench coaches. The participants engage in all those activities for only $20.

“Between 20 to 25 percent of our GHATD participants register for the league the following season, but some people participate in two GHATD’s before they join the league,” said Malinda Charter, the GHATD coordinator.

“Not everyone who goes to GHATD joins the league,” said Betsie Spann, a 13-year NCWHL member. “That’s not a requirement at all, but it does introduce a lot of women to playing ice hockey. I’d say that GHATD wakes up the hockey passion in each of us.”

For one of this year’s recruits from GHATD, the league helped her make the transition from figure skating to hockey. Adjusting to the different type of skates took some time, but the competitiveness remains - only in hockey, it’s fiercer.

The NCWHL’s “Give Hockey A Try Day” introduces women to the sport in a low-pressure, low-cost environment.
Laura Ryan

Jr. Gulls president

Thanks to a particular vice-presidential candidate, hockey moms have been getting a whole lot of press lately, and there’s none more deserving than Laura Ryan. California Rubber’s Brian McDonough chatted with the Jr. Gulls’ president about hockey in San Diego and the success of her program.

California Rubber: How did you first get involved with the Jr. Gulls program?
Laura Ryan: Eight years ago, my son began playing for the Jr. Gulls as a first-year Squirt. I was asked to be team manager that year as well as treasurer of the board by then-president Tim Pickett.

My first year was a whirlwind. I always have such deep compassion for first-year managers. It’s a thankless job that I learned firsthand. But now, as president, I do my best to remind my managers how much they’re appreciated.

CR: Talk about the Jr. Gulls and some of its philosophies?
LR: Our main focus is to develop players - all of them, from our Squirts to our Midgets. We hire good coaches, develop good hockey players and instill life lessons that will benefit each child throughout their lives.

We’re not here to the biggest club in Southern California or to run all the top teams in the state. We run our club for our members, and we do our best day after day, season after season to make sure they’re getting a great experience on and off the ice.

We work for the kids who want to be here. We don’t believe in recruiting players or lying to families. We don’t care if we have three teams or 30, we’re going to give 100 percent to the families that choose to be part of our organization.

CR: What kinds of local challenges do you face in terms of introducing more people to the sport?
LR: As with all Southern California clubs, we compete with the sun and the surf. We live a beautiful area and to get kids off the beach or away from the soccer and baseball field is a big challenge. Then throw in the cost of participating in travel ice hockey... well, we must all be crazy.

We offer Learn to Play Hockey for FREE programs and we’ve reduced the cost of our beginning skating school and in-house programs. We know kids love the sport, that’s not a challenge. The truth is most kids fall in love with this sport and never hesitate to trade the surfboard for a hockey stick once they get a taste of it.
RECIPES for SUCCESS

Northern California continues its commitment to growth, development

By Norbert Tydingco

No one would ever mistake the Golden State as a hockey hotbed, but the Northern California Junior Hockey Association and its member clubs are doing their best to turn the tide.

An expensive sport in a weak economy, hockey in California isn’t the easiest of sells. That and it’s in a region where moderate temperatures favor the more traditional outdoor pastimes like baseball, football and soccer.

There are 14 active clubs in NorCal that vary in size, from three teams to 22, with over 1,350 youth players registered this season.

Considered an uphill battle by many, but with continued help from the San Jose Sharks, who have gone above and beyond in their efforts to showcase the game to the local youth, NorCal clubs still see opportunities for growth amidst a sea of challenges.

STRONGER THAN EVER

There are a number of varying viewpoints regarding the present state of the game. Ian Fazzi, for one, has witnessed a vast improvement in the talent level coming out of the state since his youth hockey days.

“I’ve seen huge strides in the development of California hockey,” said Fazzi, the Oakland Bears president. “Many kids are going on to play at higher levels all over the place in the U.S., Canada and even Europe.”

Chris Hathaway, president of the California Cougars, also believes the game in Northern California is very strong - at least at the A and B levels.

“Teams from the area have shown that they’re amongst the best in the state and are playing against better competition, both from within the state and across the country,” said Hathaway.

But Hathaway sees room for improvement in other areas.

“We’d be much more consistent at the higher levels (AA and AAA) if we did a better job combining our resources,” he added.

The San Jose Jr. Sharks are the only organization with a bona-fide tier program, icing teams at both the Tier II (AA) and Tier I (AAA) levels in all divisions except Peewee. They do, however, have two Tier II Peewee teams this season.

A handful of clubs still field individual teams at Tier II and occasionally Tier I, and while many are competitive, there’s some that believe the distribution of elite level players among these few programs reduces the depth and competitiveness of teams within each particular age group from top to bottom.

“I think the overabundance of tier teams in both Northern and Southern California has watered down the A and B teams,” voiced San Francisco Sabercats president Jennifer Clark. “I don’t think that California really has the talent to support the number of tier teams.”

The Jr. Sharks’ director of coaching, Tony Zasowski, who also serves as the program’s 18 AAA coach, notes that Northern California players are learning what it takes to get to the higher levels.

“The mentality of the players is changing,” he said. “Players are looking at options to play at the junior level and college. I’m always pushing players to be the best, not just here, but to be the best at a national level.”

But to be the best, he adds that players need to play at the highest possible level.

“It’s difficult for a 15 year-old to say, ‘I want to play in college or juniors,’ and not be committed to playing at the AAA level,” Zasowski.

The commitment has been paying off for a number of NorCal players in recent years. The list includes Jr. Sharks graduate Corbin McPherson, who was a third-round pick of the New Jersey Devils in the 2007 NHL Entry Draft.

McPherson is playing Division I hockey this fall at Colgate University.

Viktor Tikhonov was a first-round pick of the Phoenix Coyotes last summer and made the big club this year.
He played his early years with the Santa Clara Valley Hockey Association.

The list goes on, and Zasowski is hoping to keep current and future players from having to leave the area to further their careers on ice.

“Colleges and junior teams have taken notice and are sending scouts out to California to look at our players,” he said. “And that’s a result of the hard work and that change in mentality that has earned our players and teams the respect they deserve. It’s opening doors to the higher levels.”

Zasowski is optimistic about the progress his organization is making towards being seen as a viable option for developing players for the next level.

“We have players coming in from other areas outside the state who are playing [AAA] hockey for us, but we also want our local players to be able to continue their development here until they move on to the junior level or college.”

**GROWING PAINS**

Each club faces their own unique challenges in their efforts to attract players to the sport, but there’s commonality in what they view as the biggest factor affecting stability and growth: cost.

The California North Stars have re-emerged in Sacramento and have been working hard to rebuild their club from the ground up. Flanked by the Capital Thunder in Roseville and the Vacaville Jets to the south, creating its own pool of players is a top priority.

“We know it’s going to be a tough road ahead and we’re doing what we can to make the sport more attractive to new players by keeping costs down,” said North Stars president John Thompson.

Hathaway adds that the present state of the economy hasn’t helped any.

“It’s a huge factor in potential growth,” he said. “We’re doing everything in our power to keep costs down.”

The Cougars offer their members free access to public skating and an opportunity to participate in their in-house program for little or no cost. He adds that while the in-house program is growing, it hasn’t correlated into growth at the travel level.

“Cost and competitiveness are the reasons,” said Hathaway.

In Clark’s neck of the woods, many players in San Francisco seek out greener pastures, forcing her teams to start back at Square 1.

“Everyone wants to be a Jr. Shark,” she said. “If we were able to keep players from looking elsewhere, they’d get the wins they’re looking for, but since we constantly struggle to keep what we have, we lose the better players and have to start over with a weak team.”

Indeed, the disparity in competitiveness has created what NorCal general manager John Hamer calls “dumbbell-shaped divisions” to describe the gap between teams at the top and bottom of certain brackets.

At last month’s meeting, NorCal members discussed, at length, ways to create more competitive divisions to promote growth and development.

“Nobody wants to get blown out every game but, at the same time, nobody wants to dominate every game they play,” said Hathaway.

NorCal president Lance Burrow recognizes all the members’ concerns and has placed a high priority in working to resolve them, whether it’s creating a competitive balance at both the tier and travel levels, lowering costs or assisting clubs that are struggling to bring in new players or keep existing ones.

**A HELPING HAND**

The NHL’s Sharks have been a cornerstone for the growth of hockey in the Bay Area since their first season in 1991. They’ve recently become quite active in the development and improvement of local hockey facilities with their investments in the Sharks Ice facilities in San Jose, Fremont, and, more recently, Oakland.

In late 2010 or early 2011, the Sharks will welcome a second four-sheet facility that will be anchored in Pleasanton. The Sharks announced that plans to build the facility were approved by the Pleasanton City Council over the summer.

According to Sharks ice general manager Jon Gustafson, the new facility will be part of a larger development on the 17-acre property located just north of Interstate 580.

“[The Sharks] firmly believe in the investment in the new facility,” said Gustafson. “[Because] this is not a traditional hockey market, the Sharks remain committed to the development of hockey in the region and they’ll continue to contribute to its growth.”

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**LA Hockey Club**

New coaches boast impressive resumes

LA Hockey Club and the LA Selects have welcomed some new coaches to the scene this season, three of whom are former NHL players.

**Dave Karpa**, a former Anaheim Mighty Duck, is now the co-coach of LA Hockey Club’s Bantam A team, sharing the honor with **Justin Young**.

**Bill Huard**, a former Los Angeles King, is serving as co-coach of the LA Selects’ Midget 18AA squad with former Anaheim Mighty Duck **Jean-Francois Jompe**.

**Jeff Turcotte** is working with Huard now with LA Hockey Club’s Mite A team.

The program has also ushered in some international coaching flavor. **Igor Nikulin** (a former Russian Elite League player), **Dmitri Zharov** (Russian National team) and **German Chumacheck** are three overseas imports.

Youth players Chumacheck coached in Russia include **Nikolai Khabibulin**, **Alexei Yashin** and **Sergei Samsonov**.

The 2008 national champion Peewee AAA team has become the Selects’ Bantam AAA club this year, where co-coaches **Sandy Gasseau** and **Rick Kelly** return.

That and several new girls teams have become affiliated with LA Hockey Club, according to director of hockey operations **Joseph Langevin**.

- Joshua Boyd

**LA Jr. Kings**

Goalies standing tall for 18, 16 squads

Strong goaltending propelled the Los Angeles Jr. Kings’ 18 AAA team to first place in its Midwest Elite League division after Columbus Day Weekend.

Heading into its interdivisional showcase this month in Colorado, the Jr. Kings held a 7-3-3 MWEHL mark after going 4-0-1 at the showcase event in suburban Chicago.

**Billy Faust** and **Eric Chiccone** staged big-time performances between the pipes, allowing a total of five goals in the five games while stopping 135 shots (.964 save percentage).

Faust’s 42-save effort held up in a 3-1 victory over the Chicago Fury, and he stopped all 19 shots in a 1-0 shutout of the Madison Capitols.

Chiccone turned aside 22 shots in a 6-1 victory over the Chicago Young Americans, 24 in LA’s 3-1 victory over Team Illinois, and 28 in a 2-2 draw against Chicago Mission.

The Jr. Kings’ 16 AAA team finished 2-2 at the Buffalo Regals Columbus Day Weekend Tournament. **Frank Salcido** cited the play of goalie **Nick Church** as a highlight for the 16’s.

- Chris Bayee

**Anaheim Wildcats**

Squirt B’s show promise from start

The Anaheim Wildcats’ Squirt B team’s season-opening 3-2 loss to the Bay Harbor Red Wings turned out to be almost a win, considering the Red Wings’ squad was originally slated to play at the Squirt A level.

“[In the loss], we showed we could play with one of the top teams to come out of the SCAHA preseason,” said Wildcats president **Jeffrey Bruckner**.

The Red Wings put up a 3-0 lead early in the third period, but **Austin Hanshaw** skated around three Wings players for the first Wildcats goal of 2008-09.

Hanshaw also scored his team’s second goal, while goalie **Rhett Bruckner** held the Wings at bay until he could be pulled for an extra-attacker.

**Jacob Furry** and his five fellow ’Cats swarmed the Wings, but couldn’t manufacture the equalizer.

In the Squirt 98 A’s opening game, coach **Konstantin Lodnia’s** team beat LA Hockey Club, 6-2. The Mite A’s had a huge start with a 9-0 win over the LA Jr. Kings, and the Mite B squad defeated Bay Harbor, 4-3, in its opener.

- Joshua Boyd

**California Heat**

Bantam AA quartet shines early on

Four players from the California Heat’s Bantam AA team have stood out early in the season, according to coach **Peter Torsson**.

Among them is **Brandon Smith**, an assistant captain who tallied 28 points through the first 13 games of the season.

“He’s a prominent scoring factor on the team,” said Torsson. “He’s very determined and dedicated to his team and career.”

Also helping on the offensive end is **Reno Hilterman**.

“He’s always working hard and smart, inspiring his teammates to pick up their level of play,” said the coach.

**Connor McPherson** is the team’s second-year captain “with a work ethic nobody can deny.”

“If you want to see a determined 14-year-old, then look no further,” said Torsson. “This kid will do anything to get what he wants, and he has his eyes set on the NHL.”

**Tucker May** is a first-year forward, but a scoring whiz who had 25 points through the first 14 games.

“He wants to win, but he doesn’t care about his own points or smaller things like that,” Torsson noted.

- Joshua Boyd
Kilimanjaro climb an inspiring Duck tale

By Vytas Mazeika

A life lived in fear is a life half lived.

Cheesy quote from an even cheesier movie - “Strictly Ballroom.”

But in context, it’s inspirational. Meet Bonner Paddock, 33, a senior manager of corporate partnerships with the Anaheim Ducks.

While the Ducks aren’t “Mighty” anymore, Paddock aspires to be every day. On Sept. 7, Paddock, who was born with cerebral palsy, reached the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro - the highest peak in Africa at 19,340 feet.

“It was a lot larger in person than it was in pictures, in movies and in everything else,” Paddock said. “It was huge.”

A couple of years ago Paddock challenged himself to run a marathon.

“I didn’t think I’d ever be able to physically do that, so then there’s what in turn came about with this climb,” Paddock said. “It definitely shows that [challenging yourself] not only brings you one step ahead of what you can do for your life, but there’s many more things you can probably conquer.”

United Cerebral Palsy, one of the largest health charities in America, honored Paddock with a lifetime achievement award a little over a year ago.

“That’s where I made the announcement that I would continue to live my life without limits and climb Mt. Kilimanjaro,” said Paddock, who took a rock from the summit that sits on the trophy he received.

As far as he knows, no one with cerebral palsy has ever climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro. For a whole year Paddock trained, taking hikes and lifting six days a week in the early mornings. He traveled to Colorado to get accustomed to the high altitude and climbed both Mt. Baldy and Mt. Whitney in a day.

Paddock Continued / Page 18
**Santa Clara Valley**

**Peewee’s toast German culture at ‘Pucktoberfest’**

The Santa Clara Valley Hockey Association’s Peewee B team began its season with an international diversity party celebrating Oktoberfest or, as they called it, “Pucktoberfest.”

“Coach (Michael) Meredith is German and lived and played in Germany during his youth, and my family is originally from Bavaria so we thought it would be a fun way to celebrate the opening of the season,” said team manager Mark Keil.

The Bavarian architecture at the Busch estate deep in the hills of Morgan Hill proved to be the perfect setting.

The Peewee’s learned about traditional German songs, food and even proposed a toast to their parents for the coming season.

Above the Bavarian estate was a full sport court where the boys took breaks from eating brats to shovel the biscuit around. The day ended with rides on one of many estate tractors before the kids rushed the black forest cake and strudel bar.

“We take a lot of pride in Germans being a strong part of the hockey community,” said Meredith.

“We were excited to celebrate that diversity on our team, and if that means good food and lots of fun, then all the more reason.”

- Norbert Tydingco

**San Jose Jr. Sharks**

**U18 pair recognized by NHL Central Scouting**

A pair of San Jr. Sharks – U18 AAA defensemen Dan Senkbeil and Ben Paulides - were charted on the NHL Central Scouting Bureau’s “Players to Watch” list for 2009 draft-eligibles released last month.

“This is a big step forward for our organization,” said Jr. Sharks director of coaching Tony Zasowski. “It shows that we’re developing players along with giving them an opportunity to be seen by the highest level in hockey - the NHL.”

After 16 games this season, the 6-foot-3, 185-pound Senkbeil, from Fremont, had six goals for 15 points.

“Dan played a large part in the 16 AAA team’s run to the state championship last season,” said Zasowski.

“He’s a very good offensive player with a big shot from the point.”

Paulides, a 6-foot-2, 210-pounder from Las Gatos, totaled five goals for 12 points by mid-October.

“Ben is a big, physical defenseman who is a force at both ends of the ice,” said Zasowski.

The two Jr. Sharks were the only players currently playing 18 AAA in the U.S. on the NHL list.

“They’ve been a large part of our early success and we’ll be counting on them as the season moves forward,” said Zasowski.

- Brian McDonough

**Peewee’s toast German culture at ‘Pucktoberfest’**

The Blackhawks’ Peewee B team celebrated its own version of Oktoberfest last month in Morgan Hill.

Dan Senkbeil, above, and Ben Paulides were the only two U.S. 18 AAA players pegged by the NHL’s Central Scouting Bureau.
San Jose Sharks captain Patrick Marleau recently partnered with the Sharks Foundation and the Good Tidings Foundation to construct a street hockey court at Washington Elementary School in downtown San Jose.

With the project complete, Marleau was joined last month by teammates Joe Pavelski and Jeremy Roenick, Sharks president and chief executive officer Greg Jamison, S.J. Sharkie and others to christen the court and battle the students in a game of street hockey.

“This was fun and I’m glad to be a part of it,” said Marleau following the one-hour ceremony that ended with autograph signings and ice cream for the students.

Over the past six years, the Good Tidings Foundation and the Sharks Foundation have completed construction on five street hockey courts in the Bay Area. However, this is the first that includes a current Sharks player as a financial benefactor.

In addition to the court itself, which was painted with a Sharks logo and Marleau’s name on the end of each side, the students also received a donation of street hockey equipment, including jerseys, sticks, balls and goalie gear.

“It’s quite an honor to be aligned with people who work so hard on behalf of others,” said Marleau. “I’m excited and hopeful to think that the students at Washington Elementary School will receive as much fun and enjoyment from the ability to learn and play the game of hockey as I did as a kid.”

“It’s definitely great to do things like this for the kids,” said Pavelski. “Their excitement was terrific and it was fun to be a part of it. They were probably just as excited to see Sharkie as anyone else.”

In the end, the event was really about the community. “We’re excited about what’s going on here in our community and are very proud of our players,” said Jamison.

Through help from Patrick Marleau, students at San Jose’s Washington Elementary School now have their own street hockey court.

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San Diego Jr. Gulls

The season looks promising for the San Diego Jr. Gulls’ A and B teams, all starting with the program’s youngest group, the Squirt B’s.

“That team is comprised of mostly first-year travel kids and is sure to get people talking as the season gets under way,” Gulls director Larry Cahn said of the squad, which went 2-3 in the preseason under coach Tevia Aldridge.

The Gulls’ two Peewee teams jumped out of the preseason with winning records. The B team, coached by Chris Trujillo, went 4-1, while the A’s, led by Juan Trevino, finished with a 3-2 record.

The Randy Moy-coached Bantam B team went undefeated in the preseason at 4-0, while the Bantam A’s finished with a 2-2-1 mark under the tutelage of coach Kevin Armbruster.

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“With the A’s being made up of players of all different levels, expect them to start coming together soon and battling for one of SCAHA’s eight playoff spots,” Cahn said.

The Midget 16A team, coached by Marco Trevino, finished with a 3-2 mark in the preseason.

- Joshua Boyd

San Diego Ice Arena

Squirt coach Radley a valued asset

Like a gilded messenger of hockey, Ed Radley came to San Diego from Massachusetts, where the sport has a devoted following.

Now the coach of the San Diego Ice Arena’s Squirt A team, Radley is considered by Oilers hockey director Craig Sterling to be one of the organization’s greatest assets.

“Coach Radley has been developing several of the [SDIA] players since mini-Mites,” said Sterling. “He’s put together some of the top coaches in the state to follow his strict guidelines to get these players to the next level.

“[Radley] makes sure they maintain good grades in school first, and hockey comes second,” Sterling added. “[I’m] amazed by how much time he’s put into this team and he’s seeing amazing results from the boys.”

“These boys’ biggest challenge this season will come in Quebec at the Mousquiri Tournament over the President’s Day Weekend.

“With the addition of several new players this year, due to the growth in SDIA’s hockey program, [we] hope to have a strong showing against teams from all over the world,” Sterling added.

- Joshua Boyd

Inland Valley Wild

Youth served as Mites start strong

It’s the young ones who are getting it done early for the Inland Valley Hockey Association.

The Wild’s Mite B squad jumped out to one of the best starts in club history, posting a 3-1 record in the preseason.

“The success can be attributed to several factors, including an intense developmental program started earlier in the year,” said Wild president George Milliron. “The coaching staff has really dedicated itself to providing the best development program in our area.”

Trent Horvath, who coaches the Mite B group, praises the Wild organization as a whole for its attention to detail at the younger levels of youth hockey.

“Our commitment to our youth is second to none,” Horvath said. “The increase of coach-to-player ratio has been a contributing factor.”

A trio of 7-year-olds - Matti Lempiainen, Seth Milliron and Jayden Price – has been supplying offense for the team.

At the other end of the ice, 7-year-old goaltender Jack Wolfe “has been holding the other teams at bay with awesome saves,” in his rookie year, said Horvath.

- Joshua Boyd

Inland Valley’s Mite B team is off to a strong start thanks to the association’s emphasis on youth development.

San Diego Jr. Gulls

A, B teams look good out of gates

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- Joshua Boyd
The science behind shift length

How many times have you heard your coach say, “Short shifts!”? I tend to agree with that mandate simply because they’re more economical and important for the maintenance of energy levels throughout the game.

When you extend your shift over 45 seconds, your legs begin to accumulate more lactic acid than your body can remove. As your shift length gets closer to one minute, the lactic acid builds up to the point where you reach muscular and nervous system fatigue.

And that may not seem like a big issue in the first period, but as the game progresses, muscular fatigue and that “burning legs” sensation will prevent you from playing effectively and, in turn, prevent you from contributing to your team’s success.

From a performance perspective, the stage at which your legs reach the “burn” ultimately prevents you from skating at your top speed and from producing power. The burn may also have an effect on your cognitive abilities such as focus, thinking and reactions to game situations.

By keeping your shifts between 30 and 40 seconds, you’ll remove lactic acid at an efficient rate, reduce fatigue and maintain a high-sprint capacity during the game.

During your shift, you expend energy the same way and at the same intensity as a 200- or 400-meter sprinter. Your training must prepare you for multiple bouts of sprint-like intensity, 30 to 45 seconds in length.

Running drills such as 200- to 400-meter sprints, 150-yard and 300-yard shuttles and on-ice skating patterns that are position-specific and meet the shift-length requirements are beneficial for lactic-acid training. Your rest period should be double or triple that of your work period.

With that said, skating drills that meet shift-length requirements and patterning are better for in-season training than running. Skating gives you an opportunity to practice at a high intensity. This type of shift-length training should be done post-practice or post-workout.

And when you perform these types of intervals, use the right footwear and do them on natural grass or a rubberized track surface.

Mike Potenza is the San Jose Sharks’ strength and conditioning coordinator.
POWER REIGNS SUPREME

Introducing a new source of power, the SUPREME ONE95. With a mid kick point for maximum loading, it’s built to make goalies fear the dark.
Like father, like son isn’t a trite cliché when it comes to Oswego (N.Y.) State freshman defenseman Hank Van Boxmeer.

On and off the ice, the Orange native is a spitting image of his father, former NHL blueliner John Van Boxmeer, a first-round draft pick of the Montreal Canadiens in 1972 who also played for the Colorado Rockies, Buffalo Sabres and Quebec Nordiques.

“It’s obvious Hank has good bloodlines,” said Oswego State coach Ed Gosek.

Hank, 20, says his father has been a wonderful mentor for him.

“My father played defense at the highest level,” he said. “I talk to him every time I have frustrations or questions.”

This year, Hank is focusing on helping Oswego State climb back up the ladder in NCAA Division III. The Lakers won the national championship in 2007 - the school’s only national title in any sport.

As the season began, Hank was one of the Lakers’ top six defensemen and the quarterback on one of the two power-play units.

“For a big kid, Hank has good hands,” Gosek said. “I wouldn’t say he’s a physical player, but he competes. He doesn’t shy away from anything.”

Shy is not a word that describes Hank.

“I like to chirp when I play, get in people’s faces and their heads,” he said. “A have a lot of opinions.”

Gosek says Hank’s teammates like him for many reasons, including his outgoing nature.

“Hank is easy-going, fun-loving and a good character person, which is important in our program,” the coach said. “He’s a good team guy; he isn’t selfish.”

Born in Buffalo, N.Y., Hank moved to Orange when he was 7. The family headed west when John took a job coaching the ECHL’s Long Beach Ice Dogs.

Hank began his hockey career with the South Coast Sabres and LA Hockey Club before playing Midgets with Russell Stover in Kansas City when he was a senior in high school.

After spending two seasons with the Salmon Arm Silverbacks in the British Columbia League, he decided to head to Oswego State.

“I wanted to go to a school with a good hockey atmosphere, where hockey is the main sport,” Hank said.

- Steve Stein
Valencia’s top line flying high

The Phoenix Polar Bears’ dominance in the Western States Hockey League might be in trouble this season. That’s because a trio of homegrown talent residing with the Valencia Flyers – the forward line of Andrew Monesi, Brian Voogt and Daniel Chang – has taken the league by storm in the early goings.

“They have the most chemistry I’ve ever seen on one line,” Flyers head coach Chris Hartly said. “They’re all really skilled and hard workers; they push each other.”

All three echo Hartly regarding the reasons for their success.

“We’re competitive,” said Chang, the youngest of the group at 17. “We always talk after the game about who had the most points.”

Speaking of points, there’s been plenty to go around. Monesi (30 points), Voogt (27) and Chang (24) occupied the top-three scoring positions in league’s Western Division by mid-October with no signs of slowing down.

From left, Brian Voogt, Andrew Monesi and Daniel Chang have been among the WSHL’s top scorers early on.

Their chemistry carries over off the ice as well, as the three frequently engage in video-game battles until the early-morning hours.

“They pulled together right away,” said Hartly, who is in his first season behind the Flyers’ bench. “Most guys come in to [the season] with walls up, but these guys are a great example for the whole team.”

For Monesi, the team’s captain, this is his last year with the Flyers and he’s hoping to parlay his success into a chance at the Division III level out east. Chang wants his offensive exploits this season to get him on the radar of a USHL or NAHL team as he also chases a college hockey opportunity.

Although it’s still early in the season, the Flyers certainly have an opportunity to challenge for a Western Division title.

“We have the potential,” Hartly said, “but it’s not going to be an easy walk.”

- Jeremy Balan
Advancing too soon has its consequences

It’s a question heard each fall at hockey rinks: “Should we move Billy up a level this year?”

Many parents contemplate moving their child up early in order to “give them more of a challenge.” The levels of USA Hockey are bracketed by age in such a way that players of similar skills will usually play together, but no matter what, there will always be players who excel more than others.

I agree that moving a player up will allow them to play with and against better players who will force them to work harder and improve his skills, but they’d do that by moving up at the proper time anyway.

Some parents fear that their child may be bored at their current level. As a coach, I can tell you that most young hockey players aren’t bored with being able to skate around the other players and score time and again.

Why not let your child be a star for a year or two? As their career progresses, they may not have another 70-goal season again. Let them enjoy it while they can.

What’s more, I’ve seen plenty of good players who excel at skating, passing and shooting, but don’t have the maturity to play at the next level.

At the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro is a “Let’s Go Ducks!” towel used in the playoffs. Paddock left it on Day 6 upon reaching his goal during the historic climb.

“I didn’t bring my Stanley Cup ring up to the top,” Paddock said. “I left that at home.”

Six days up, two days down. Sounds easier on paper.

“It was a lot more daunting and a lot harder,” said Paddock, whose hand-picked group of 10 climbers ran into a cold front that moved in and left temperatures in the neighborhood of 40 below zero, meaning all were unable to sleep at night in freezing tents. “It definitely slowed the group down. The continual day-after-day wear and tear is what I think really took its toll on everybody because the body was never really able to warm up and stay warm.”

It would’ve been easy to turn back. To say enough is enough, I almost got there. But that means living a life with limits.

“Never, not from us,” Paddock said. “Definitely that thought will creep into your head, but it’s never spoken.”

Near the end, water froze less than an hour during the climb. That meant no water for four or five hours at a time during 50 mile-per-hour gusts.

“It took everything that I had and then some,” Paddock said. “The summit day was off the charts with being out in sub-zero weather for 10 hours.”

Paddock wrote a journal to capture his journey. Check it out on http://kili.ucp-oc.org, the same Web site that tracks the close to $250,000 he raised for charity.

No one ever doubted Paddock, but definitely those who know him were glad to find out their friend with cerebral palsy was back home and safe.

“The amount of people that sent me e-mails or voicemails or some kind of contact was overwhelming,” Paddock said. “There was definitely a big sigh of relief from my mom and everything. Obviously my family was the most nervous, and my close friends.”

It’s unlikely Paddock will ever climb another mountain. Those days are behind him. Today he’s enjoying lots of sleep as his body heals after the training and climb.

What lies ahead is unknown. But never improbable.

“I proved that if you put your mind to it and you really believe in yourself, that you can do anything,” Paddock said.
Who says you can never go home again?
The road back to California took Tim Kraus and Itan Chavira across North America and even to Europe, but both native sons landed on the opening-night roster of the ECHL’s expansion Ontario Reign.

While the duo took different paths to their first pro hockey job, they share another attribute besides their California roots - both have won multiple championships in hockey.

Kraus, who is from Garden Grove, took a more traditional route to the Reign. After playing ice hockey in Huntington Beach and roller hockey as a youth, friends Bobby Ryan and John Kemp encouraged him to try out for the Los Angeles Jr. Kings' entry into the Quebec Peewee Tournament. Kraus made it and played on two Jr. Kings national championship travel teams (the 2002 14U squad and the 2003 16U team).

Kraus was taken in the WHL Bantam Draft by Vancouver in 2003 and played in the Western Hockey League for five seasons, a span that included the 2006 Memorial Cup with the Giants.

“The one year we won the league and got to go to the Memorial Cup,” Kraus said. “The next year we hosted and won the Memorial Cup. So I’ve had a great young career as far as winning championships.”

Chavira, on the other hand, had not played ice hockey until four years ago. Rather, the Upland resident made his mark in roller hockey, including playing for the United States in the 2007 Inline Hockey World Championships and the 2006 Inline Hockey U21 World Championships. He also was on the winning team for the USA Championships in 2006 and the Winter/Summer 2006 NARCh champions.

“I made Team USA, and that was my biggest goal in roller hockey,” Chavira said. “Now I’m transferring to ice, and this is a big opportunity.”

Chavira’s ice hockey odyssey took him from the Inland Valley Coyotes’ Midget AA team to WSHL's San Diego Surf to a brief stay with the USHL’s Ohio Jr. Blue Jackets then back to San Diego.

“[At that point] I was pretty much over hockey,” Chavira said. “I wanted to come back home and go to Bible college. So I came back and finished the (2006-07) junior season off.”

When a close friend had an opportunity to try out in Canada, Chavira went along and made the team. But his travels weren’t done.

“This summer I went to the Czech Republic and Austria to train and to [attend] some camps,” he said. “I tried out for a European team and didn’t make it. I ran out of money, so I came back.

“Then this opportunity popped up. To have a chance to basically play in your backyard is nuts.”

Chavira went to the Reign’s free-agent tryout camp and ended up being the only player from that camp to make the team.

“I had nothing to lose,” the 5-foot-9, 170-pound Chavira said. “I went to the tryout with no pressure. I just said, ‘I’m going to go out there and have fun the whole time. This could lead to better opportunities.’

“I had a good camp so I got offered to the main camp. I was intimidated at first. I didn’t know what to expect, going from Junior A to pro. The first time I went on the ice it was like, ‘These guys are huge.’ But once I started passing with them and getting into drills it was simple. After that my confidence went up. It felt like I fit in.”

Chavira’s puck skills no doubt helped that transition.

“The best I’ve ever seen in my life,” Reign coach Karl Taylor said. “It’s crazy, those roller hockey guys work on things, and he has moves that he does that one else can do. If he can get his skating [stronger] and learn to play without the puck, then he has a chance to stay here.”

The 6-foot, 197-pound Kraus already has made his mark. After a strong training camp, he assisted on the winning goal in the Reign’s inaugural game.
**Confidence, composure go a long way**

Competent officials must have confidence in themselves and their abilities, and that self-confidence must transcend any particular game or situation.

That means remaining in control during adversity. Of course there might be self-doubt on some close calls, but it’s important to keep your poise. Confident officials don’t hesitate when making close, critical calls and never second-guess themselves.

Every official has games they’d rather forget, but confident officials don’t let those games undermine their future judgment.

Coaches and players will quickly notice an official who lacks confidence and will try to take advantage of the situation. Without confidence in yourself, it’s hard to command the respect of the players, coaches and fans.

A good tool to regain your confidence is to ask to be critiqued and watch clips of games that you’ve worked and take notes on where you can improve.

It’s not unusual for emotions and tensions of players, coaches and spectators to run high, especially during the initial and latter stages of a game. Just realize that being calm and relaxed in the heat of the action is also a learned skill.

By creating a positive emotional climate, you allow yourself to get into an ideal performance state and execute successfully in pressure situations. Although you can’t necessarily control the emotions of others, you are expected to be in control of yours, no matter what the circumstance.

When it comes to making a call, an official’s decision should occur simultaneously with the action observed, or as soon thereafter as possible.

This doesn’t mean you should make all calls without hesitation; you might need to take a slight pause to comprehend the act you’ve just witnessed. Too long of a pause, however, gives the players and coaches the impression that you’re uncertain, and they’re much more likely to question the call.

You can often avoid controversy by making quick and decisive rulings. And the closer the decision, the more important decisiveness becomes.

Michel Voyer is the director of the California Referee School, an NHL video goal judge and the director of officials at El Segundo’s Toyota Sports Center.

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**Mane of the Month**

Sebastian Whitehead of the San Francisco Sabercats’ Squirt A team

(Shown here after officiating a Mite game at Yerba Buena Ice Skating Center in San Francisco)

He wins a FREE composite stick, compliments of Warrior Hockey!

To enter, send a photo of your hockey hair to maneofthegame@calirubber.com

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**San Diego Saints**

**Two tier teams a first for young Saints**

Now in their sixth year of existence – their third within SCAHA - the San Diego Saints took a big step forward this season, icing two tier teams – Bantam AA and Midget 16AA – for the first time.

Both clubs had success at their respective A levels last season, and the goal is to continue challenging and developing the players within the organization.

“The goal of our program is to help develop young players, provide them with as many opportunities to succeed as possible, constantly expose them to new challenges, while also providing them with a safe environment to experience the numerous life lessons that youth sports provides,” said Saints hockey director Jason Galea.

Over Thanksgiving weekend, both teams will compete in the Silver Stick tournament, which will provide them with the chance to play against elite teams from other parts of the country they normally wouldn’t play.

Both teams will also take part in the Paul Coffey Invitational tournament in Toronto, where a visit to the Hockey Hall of Fame is also on the agenda.

- Joshua Boyd

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**Official Business with Michel Voyer**

He wins a FREE composite stick, compliments of Warrior Hockey!
A New Beginning

NorCal transplant Angeles enjoying her LA experience

By Lindsay Czarnecki

Two years ago everything seemed out of place. A new home, new team, new city and new school for Carleah Angeles.

There were extremes to each new aspect of life. A new home meant leaving her parents at age 16. A new team meant adjusting to playing on an all-girls squad. A new city meant uprooting herself from her hometown in San Jose to move in with her older brother, Patrick, nearly 400 miles into Southern California. A new school meant leaving old friends and searching for new ones.

All this for hockey.

“I was pretty excited but leaving my family, it was the worst feeling,” Angeles, who goes by CJ, said.

Her parents suggested driving her down from San Jose every weekend to play, but living with Patrick made the most sense and allowed CJ to be committed and focused on hockey with less wear and tear from traveling.

“It was weird for me, too, because I really don’t know too many people around the area so I was just trying to find ways to keep busy so that she wasn’t stuck in her room,” Patrick said. “Find ways to get her from missing San Jose, that was the biggest thing, trying to get her out and get her involved.”

CJ, now a senior, attends Aliso Niguel High School, but to start, everything was a struggle, especially after leaving her comfort zone and, more importantly, friends in San Jose.

“Day 1 of school was horrible,” she recalled. “I mostly just walked around by myself, sat by myself. But in San Jose I had all these friends, was part of the popular group, knew everybody in school.”

Hockey though, was a constant - an aspect of life that still felt right at home. Angeles joined the Under-16 Cal Selects and soon had a family away from home. But just like any new experience, there were growing pains at the start. Her defensive partner, Becca Koppel, was there to watch it all unfold.

“At first it was definitely hard. Before she was always talking about how she missed home, but now this is her home basically,” Koppel said. “Before she was trying to live vicariously over there and reminisce in the past, but now it’s like... she’s here.

“Since the moment she got here, she had friends. We’re a very supportive team and we all stick together so right away she didn’t have to worry about making friends; we were all there for her no matter what. If she had problems at school, she could talk to us.”

Koppel recalls a shy Angles isolating herself early on by dressing outside of the locker room. Eventually, a team-bonding activity at their first tournament broke any awkward barrier that was in place.

Those days seem so long ago as now the outgoing, stay-at-home defenseman is captaining her second LA Selects team, the first Under-19 team in the program’s short history.

For the second season, Patrick is the assistant coach on her team. She rarely sees her parents or younger sister. For better or worse, Patrick is the lone family member in her days on a regular basis.

Mixing the lines between coach-player and older brother-sister can be quite a challenge.

“He’s always on me about my grades, he’s always pushing me and that’s what I like about him,” CJ said.

In the end, the siblings understand that the sometimes the tough love given by Patrick is what will be most beneficial for CJ in the long run as she strives for a chance to play at the Division I college level. She gives her brother credit for all the help he’s provided her along the way.

So far, Angeles has drawn interest from Quinnipiac and Niagara as well as Manhattanville, always a national championship contender in the Division III ranks.

And as she contemplates her college options, it’s playing the sport she loves that still appeases her homesickness the most.

“Just playing hockey and seeing my teammates,” CJ said. “It just makes me feel good because they’re actually like a family.”

Completely out of her shell, Angeles is now hoping to guide the Selects to their second straight Pacific District championship and an appearance at Nationals before heading off to college.

“Playing with LA is the greatest feeling,” she said. 

At home in LA, college hopeful CJ Angeles is captaining the LA Selects’ U19 team this season.

Photo / PhotoReflect.com
Hockeylessons.net matches students, instructors

What do you do when you want to get better at something? You take lessons. But in the hockey world, you play games as a team and you practice as a team.

You can go to stick-time and practice, but how do you know what to change in your technique? You can’t watch your own feet as you crossover and you can’t watch yourself shoot that slap shot!

And that’s where private lessons can help. More hockey players - kids and adults alike - are seeking private instruction to improve their skills in order to make them better players. With the wealth of talented private instructors in California, it’s like having your own personal coach at your fingertips.

So, how do you find a private instructor? The answer is Hockeylessons.net, a revolutionary, database-driven Web site with variable search technology specifically designed to match student to instructor.

Just plug in the variables of all the things you’re looking for in an instructor, and let the Web site do its magic! It finds an instructor - or a pool of instructors - that match your search criteria.

Are you looking for private lessons in the mornings before school or, if you’re an adult, before work? Do you need to take lessons within 10 miles of your residence? Do you need off-ice training to boost your on-ice performance? Would you like to take private lessons from that guy named “Pierre” at your rink, but you don’t know his last name?

Hockeylessons.net has all these answers.

“This is a way of helping both the instructors as well as the students,” Hockeylessons.net founder Andy Selinger explains. “Whereas before you would have to rely on word-of-mouth to find a good teacher, now you can jump on Hockeylessons.net for free and find a great teacher that fits what you’re looking for. And instructors now have a Web site that covers all of North America, doing their marketing for them.”

Hockeylessons.net uses The Hockey News, USA Hockey Magazine and many other publications and Web sites in North America to market its revolutionary service to over 2.5 million people, making the Web site the best place to find a private hockey instructor and, if you’re a private instructor, to be found.

Not only does Hockeylessons.net match students to hockey instructors, but it also matches students to hockey schools and will soon start posting tips, drills and blogs by well-known hockey coaches.

See the Hockeylessons.net ad on the back cover.

Orange County Hockey Club

There’s no debating McKenzie’s promise

Opponents of the Orange County Hockey Club’s Midget 16AAA team would be unwise to get into an argument with OCHC second-year defenseman Lucus McKenzie.

That’s because McKenzie participates in the Mock Trial Club at Pacific Coast High School. Other Orange County high schools compete against PCHS in hopes of moving on to state and national finals. McKenzie, a third-year Mock Trial member and hopeful future lawyer, works with an attorney/coach as “practice.”

The Pacific Coast High School is part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an accredited high school that takes an aggressive, experimental approach to learning. Part of this is through offering online, on-campus and hybrid classes to students. It works, as McKenzie is a member of the National Honor Society.

All of this, and he takes part in a busy hockey schedule with the OCHC’s Midgets, where national travel on the weekends is the norm. And wherever the tournament is, you can bet McKenzie’s schoolbooks won’t be far behind.

“Through the opportunities that my schooling has afforded me, and through some hard work, I have a lot of flexibility, both in terms of hockey and education,” McKenzie said.

- Joshua Boyd

Hockey is only half the story when talking about accomplished student Lucus McKenzie.
Take control of what you can control

It always surprises me when players, coaches and spectators lose their focus when the unexpected happens during a game.

Hockey takes up a lot of energy, and players need to learn to focus theirs on things they can control, and that really boils down to one thing: how they play.

As a former goalie, I had to learn the hard way that I had no control over how my team played in front of me. Or, to take it a step further, I had no control over if I was even going to start in a game.

Sometimes, I found myself trying to shut out the other team every game. Before I knew it, I was in a slump. My coach at the time told me that even the best goaltenders in the NHL got scored on twice a game on average. Again, something I couldn’t control.

As players, you have no control over when the coach puts you on the ice, what calls referees make or the bad bounces a puck may take over the course of a game.

What players do have control over is how they play when they’re given an opportunity to make something happen. Plain and simple, a player controls their effort and focus when they’re on the ice. If you don’t like how things are going out there, change it.

With that said, one rule I preach to my teams is not to make negative comments. Don’t tell another player that “Player X” is not good, complain about the referee or get down when behind in a game. Negative attitudes are contagious and can ruin a team in no time.

Once a player makes a negative comment, it becomes an excuse and the team starts to buy into that souring attitude.

So remember, hockey takes a lot of energy, wasting it on things out of your control is a waste of your time. Focus on the one thing you can control: your play.

Tony Zasowski is the director of coaching and the U18 AAA head coach of the San Jose Jr. Sharks.

Kraus piled up the points during his final three seasons in the WHL (226 in 184 games), but his all-around play has impressed Taylor.

“Timmy’s a solid two-way [center],” Taylor said. “I thought he was going to be more one-dimensional. In the exhibition season we saw some of the things that he does well.”

Kraus, who also went to Europe to further his career, takes nothing for granted.

“At the beginning of the year I was in Germany expecting to play there,” he said. “I’d signed a nine-month contract, but things didn’t work out.

“I was kind of scrambling for a some place to play, and my uncle started sending out e-mails. Karl got a hold of me and we started talking. Everything sounded good, coming back to California and playing for a brand-new team, having my parents 35 minutes down the road, so I jumped on it.

“It’s great to see my dad and step-mom again. They haven’t seen me play hockey regularly for 5-6 years. I’ve got aunts, uncles and cousins here, so every game I’ll probably see a family member, so it’s going to be really comfortable for me.”

As the youngest of 10 children, family clearly is important to Chavira as well, and playing so close to them is special.

“My mom’s probably seen three ice hockey games my whole life,” he said. “So for her to be able to come and watch me... it’s unreal.”

USA Hockey is the national governing body for the sport of ice hockey in the United States.

To find hockey near you, visit usahockey.com
Keeping with inline hockey’s charitable spirit, the second annual “Give Blood, Play Hockey” tournament took place last month at the 949 Roller Hockey Center in Irvine.

Sixty-eight teams from 8U through the 18U levels, along with high school, women’s and adult divisions, showed up to play in the event which supports the Children’s Hospital of Orange County by means of blood donation and fundraising.

A skills competition that included Fastest Skater, Top Goal tender, Top Sniper and Best Trick Shot was a big hit with young players. The Anaheim Ducks’ Power Play Girls were among the judges for the skills competition, and prizes were sponsored by Mission, Eschelon, Revision and Hyper.

“This year’s event exceeded both the enrollment and excitement of last year,” said 949 president Eddie Limbaga.

By the end of the three-day event, more than 150 pints of blood were donated and $25,000 was raised for CHOC. In addition, nearly $5,000 was raised for the “Be A Hero, Be A Donor” organization, which focuses on educating people about registering with the National Marrow Donor Program.

“It’s great to see the youth of today use their time in a very selfless way,” said Limbaga. “They volunteered to a cause that helps others rather than themselves.”

A large volunteer effort from the community was instrumental in making the event a success. Students from Mater Dei High School, including Brett Kollman, Grady Sampley, Peter Quayle, Monty Ruff and Ruben Rumbaut, contributed their own time to help organize the event.

Mary Quayle, who was soon to be a senior at Mater Dei High School, created the event last year as a community service project for school credit. Quayle was inspired by her grandfather who passed away after battling a rare form of cancer and was receiving three pints of blood a week while fighting the disease.

- Alex Dodt

Details announced for 2009 NARCh events

NARCh has announced the dates and locations for the three biggest tournaments of the 2009 roller hockey season: West Coast WinterNationals, East Coast WinterNationals and NARCh Finals.

West Coast WinterNationals will return to California, but this time will move north to the Silvercreek Sportsplex in San Jose, the site of last year’s NARCh Finals.

“The return to Silvercreek for WinterNationals was a pretty obvious choice,” said NARCh president Daryn Goodwin. “It’s a great facility and we had a great turnout for the Finals there last year.”

San Jose and the surrounding area is also a great roller hockey community, which has been pushed along by the opening of the state-of-the-art facility.

“Northern California has a lot of potential for growth,” said Goodwin. “So we want to help that along and be part of it as well.”

WinterNationals will run from Jan. 16-19 with the NARCh Pro final coming on Sunday, Jan. 18. East Coast WinterNationals is set for February in Bethpage, N.Y.

“The Pro division should be great at both WinterNationals events,” Goodwin added. “The rosters are still filled with the best players in the sport.”

The past year, NARCh Pro was full of parity, especially at WinterNationals.

“Pro teams at WinterNationals are usually missing a key guy or two due to minor-pro hockey or college,” said Goodwin. “This creates opportunity for someone new to step up.”

NARCh Finals, the climax of the 2009 season, will return to the Hershey Centre in Toronto, site of the highly successful 2006 Finals.

“The NARCh Finals next summer should be great,” said Goodwin. “The Hershey Centre in Mississauga is a fantastic facility and there’s a lot to do in and around Toronto.”

- Alex Dodt
AIHL rolls into Southern California

By Alex Dodt

Over the past 15 years, the professional - or elite men’s - roller hockey game in Southern California has endured many changes.

Roller Hockey International (RHI) was the only game in town for most of the 1990’s and the league boasted popular teams like the Anaheim Bullfrogs with attendance that averaged over 10,000 some seasons.

Since the RHI folded in 1999, pro roller hockey has survived primarily in tournament series. Both NARCh and TORHS hold very prestigious Pro division tournaments each summer with tens-of-thousands-of-dollars in prize money up for grabs.

Most recently, the Inline Hockey Association (IHA), or the “Elite League,” as it was commonly called, made an attempt to revive professional roller hockey in California. That circuit short-circuited, however, folding in 2006.

Now, the American Inline Hockey League (AIHL) is readying for its inaugural season in 2009, with five new franchises based in Southern California. A few years after the IHA folded, the AIHL is hoping to rehabilitate the elite men’s game in the region.

Joe Noris operates the Skate San Diego rink and has been a part of many attempts at professional roller hockey in Southern California, including the RHI as president of the San Diego Barracudas franchise. He will also be coaching the San Diego Voodoo, the AIHL franchise that will call Skate San Diego its home.

“I think the AIHL has a formula to be successful,” said Noris. “But we’re not doing this to draw thousands of people paying $20 a ticket. It’s not going to be the RHI, but it can succeed on a smaller stage.”

In addition to Voodoo, there will be four other Southern California teams in the AIHL’s Pacific South Division: Anaheim’s Jr. Ducks, Huntington Beach’s OC Blades, West Covina’s Pama Cyclones and the Irvine Anarchy, based out of the 949 Roller Hockey Center.

“For the most part, this will be the best players from each rink,” said Noris. “So as long as the rinks are operating and doing well, the league will do well.”

Northern California will also be a part of the league with a five-team division of its own. Four existing franchises - the NorCal Mustangs, NorCal Riot, San Jose Pirates and East Bay Jawz - will be joined by a new team based in Oakland to form the Pacific North Division.

“The non-profit aspect of the AIHL was a big drawing point for the California teams,” said AIHL president Keith Noll. “The costs to get in the league are not exorbitant.”

AIHL teams will play a 32-game-regular season schedule that will conclude in May. Most of those games will be against divisional opponents, but there will also be opportunity to play teams from other divisions.

Many divisions in the league are experimenting with “festival-style” scheduling, in which several teams come to one location to play in what amounts to a small tournament. This reduces travel costs and creates unique matchups.

One such event is in the works the weekend prior to the annual Let’s Play Hockey trade show, which will be held in January in Las Vegas. Teams from the Southwest Division will play teams from across the league, including Southern California.

“An event like the Let’s Play Hockey Show is a great opportunity for the AIHL to showcase some teams,” said Noll. “A lot of teams have shown interest in coming to this event and making it very successful.”

A total of 31 teams will compete in the AIHL in 2009 in six divisions from California to Texas to Georgia to New York. Division champions will advance to the AIHL playoffs, which will conclude in July at the AAU Jr. Olympics.

“Teams will be voting on proposals at the Let’s Play Hockey Show,” said Noll. “They’ll decide the exact format of playoffs, whether a West Coast champion meets an East Coast champion at the Jr. Olympics or if the winners of each division will go there.”

Professional inline hockey has proved to be a success in Northern California.

Photo / Northern California Mustangs

“Professional inline hockey has proved to be a success in Northern California.”

USA Junior Hockey Magazine
USAJuniorHockey.com
NCWHL helps get NorCal women on ice

**NCWHL from Page 4**

“I didn’t realize how I’d missed having a competitive outlet until I played in the scrimmage at GHATD,” said **Laura DeForest**. “It was just such a blast and I love the sense of accomplishment that comes with giving your all to chase down a puck.”

The lack of opportunity for women to play hockey in Northern California is what motivated **Theresa Green**, a former University of Connecticut ice hockey club member, to establish the NCWHL in the summer of 1993. It’s a volunteer recreational women’s league that plays at several ice rinks in the Bay Area.

Four teams were formed from women who had been attending scrimmages in the Bay Area. There are four divisions that welcome all levels of play and challenges players at every level: recreational beginner, intermediate, advanced intermediate and advanced.

All players must attend a placement session to determine which division best suits their level of play, which helps keep each division competitive. One-hundred-and-ninety-one skaters are registered in all divisions this season, mostly in the intermediate and advanced intermediate divisions.

The NCWHL is a non-checking league, which, unlike men’s leagues, includes a non-verbal abuse policy. Good sportsmanship is heavily stressed among the NCWHL.

Many women also like the physical and mental challenge from hockey rather than a traditional gym routine.

“After my first season, I’m in the best shape I’ve been in for the past three years.”

The league, women not only are given the chance to play hockey, but they’re given the chance to participate in a team sport where friendships, learning and accomplishments are all part of the game.

And the best part about the NCWHL is that they make all those opportunities easy and non-intimidating.

“My advice is to just go ahead and sign up,” said **Laura DeForest**. “It’s competitive and exciting, but the teams are very inclusive and supportive. It’s so much fun and not a huge time commitment.”

For more information on GHATD and the NCWHL, visit NCWHL.com.

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**Interview from Page 5**

**CR:** Are the existing San Diego program working together to help grow participation?

**LR:** Yes, they are. All four of the programs participate in the In-House Metro League that involves each rink’s teams playing each other to ensure a full and competitive season for new players to the sport.

The rinks’ hockey directors meet frequently and work closely together. The Jr. Gulls’ director of hockey, **Larry Cahn**, serves as the Escondido hockey director as well. The same falls true for SDIA and the Kroc Center; therefore the key members of the local travel clubs are bound together by the common goal of developing the youth at the in-house level.

Things haven’t always been roses and sunshine with all of us down here, but we’ve come a long way in the past few years and I believe each program has a positive effect on our hockey community. It’s our belief that San Diego hockey would benefit from one sole tier program as we did in the past. It’s still our hope that we can offer that one day.

**CR:** What kind of an impact would a professional team have on the growth of the sport, in your opinion?

**LR:** It helps any sport to have a pro team locally. I don’t know if a pro team will pop up in San Diego any day soon, but in the meantime we love having the Ducks and Kings right up the road; they’re both great for the youth hockey community and do a lot for the all of the SCAHA clubs.

**CR:** Talk about the inception of the Gulls’ junior team.

**LR:** It’s been so much fun! **Bruce Miller** coached three years with the Jr. Gulls prior to taking on this new venture and he’s done an incredible job.

The home games are so much fun! There’s a beer garden, the Gulls mascot, games and prizes at intermission. It’s a blast! People come to our games from all over San Diego and Riverside County. Our season-opener was sold out!

The team has its own customized locker room exclusive for their use, multiple team sponsors and is ran with a professionalism that is turning heads throughout the WSHL. We’re really excited about it.

But most importantly, it’s become an affordable option for players who are ready for the next level but don’t want to leave San Diego. Most of the players are still Midget eligible as well as AAA-level caliber, so we decided to combine the WSHL’s 50-game schedule with a AAA tournament schedule to provide these kids the exposure at both levels while keeping the cost substantially lower than traditional AAA programs.

The WSHL player dues are only $6,500. This includes all travel expenses! They’ll pay a few hundred dollars more if they participate in the AAA tournaments. The dollar-to-dollar comparison is a huge savings for our members.

We’re thrilled to have this option for our youth members as they get older. Our little guys really look up to the Junior A team.

**CR:** Is there any desire to create a AAA program?

**LR:** We believe each player needs to play at the appropriate level to develop, regardless if that’s B, A, AA or AAA. We’ll only field teams at levels that are appropriate for our members. We will not run a AAA team based on the talent of a few. We will not recruit entire teams of kids away from their hometowns, parents, schools or local clubs just to field a AAA team.

Each year we’re met with this challenge and our coaching staff evaluates what’s best for these elite players. Often we’ve had to encourage players to travel up to the LA area to compete on a AAA level or stay local on our Junior A team.

Regardless of those few, we must do what we feel is best for the majority of our members. Fielding a AAA team doesn’t measure the success of a club. With or without a AAA program, the Jr. Gulls remains a top organization in Southern California.

Read the entire interview at CaliRubber.com!
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