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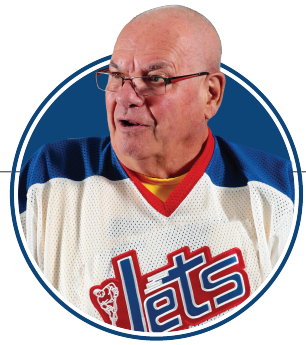

JOSH MORRISSEY

THE OLYMPIAN

The only member of the Winnipeg Jets to be named to Team Canada for the 2026 Winter Olympics, Josh Morrissey is one of the world's greatest players. And now you can have a sensational piece of Morrissey's Jets legacy for your home.

This magnificent, framed autographed piece of memorabilia is 26" X 30" and features an exclusive photograph of Morrissey in his blue Jets home uniform. This piece is available only at Joe Daley's Sports & Framing for the low, low price of $329. It's a perfect gift for your favourite Jets fan.



Morrissey, 30, just made his Olympic debut at Milano Cortina 2026 and was a member of Canada's championship team at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off last year. His first experience with the senior national team came at the 2017 IIHF World Championship where he helped Canada take home a silver medal. Morrissey twice represented Canada at the IIHF World Junior Championships, winning gold in 2015 when he earned a spot on the Tournament All-Star Team. The fast, skilled Jets defenceman made his international debut in 2012 at the World U17 Hockey Challenge as a member of Canada Pacific.

Morrissey was selected by the Jets in the first round (13th overall) in the 2013 NHL Draft out of the Prince Albert Raiders of the Western Hockey League. Later, during the 2014-15 season, he led the Kelowna Rockets to the WHL championship and then to the Memorial Cup final. He has played his entire 11-year NHL career with the Jets and is signed through the 2027-28 season.



JOSH MORRISSEY, TEAM CANADA

Photo by Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

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GAME ON MAGAZINE'S 2025
PLAYER OF THE YEAR

TRAVIS SANHEIM

Photos by Rusty Barton and courtesy of Alex Sanheim and HHOF/Images on Ice

Travis Sanheim, of tiny Elkhorn, Manitoba, is the 2025 *Game On Magazine Player of the Year*.

From farm kid to Olympic-bound NHL standout, Sanheim has emerged as one of Canada's most dependable defencemen. Serving as a cornerstone of the Philadelphia Flyers' blueline, the 29-year-old logged major minutes in all situations throughout the 2024-25 season, recording 36 points in 82 games while leading the club with a +8 rating and averaging nearly 23 minutes per contest. His steady two-way play and leadership helped solidify his reputation as one of the league's most reliable minute-eaters.

That consistency carried over onto the international stage. Representing Canada at the 2025 4 Nations Face-Off, Sanheim worked his way into the lineup and played an important role on a deep defensive corps, helping Canada capture the championship against the world's top hockey nations.

His performance on hockey's biggest stages did not go unnoticed. Sanheim was officially named to Team Canada's roster for the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milano Cortina, marking his Olympic debut and placing him among the nation's elite defencemen.

Now the longest-tenured defenceman on the Flyers and a veteran presence both at home and abroad, Sanheim continues to elevate his game while proudly representing his province and country. With an Olympic medal to prove it, the Elkhorn product has already cemented himself as one of Manitoba's premier hockey ambassadors.

Congratulations, Travis, from the editorial board of *Game On Magazine*.

PLAYER OF



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TRAVIS AND WIFE ALEX SANHEIM CELEBRATING HIS 4 NATIONS GOLD MEDAL

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JETS HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT



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THE LINEUP

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CELEBRATING OUR PLAYERS OF THE MONTH



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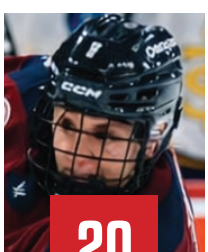

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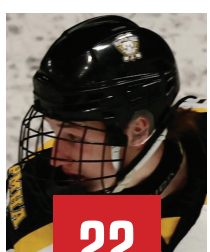

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94

Familiarity, appreciation and trust have Pembina Valley coaches singing Ethan Wilde's praises.

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GAME ON is Manitoba's hockey community. This is where hockey fans will meet the stars of the game here in Manitoba and where our goal is to pay tribute to those who make hockey this province's most beloved sport.
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A DAY LATE AND A DOLLAR SHORT

'The World Series-winning run is thrown out an inch from home plate.'

'The ball is lodged in the outfield wall.'

'Nathan MacKinnon hits the post on the wide-open net.'

'The Los Angeles Dodgers are World Series Champions.'

'The United States have won Olympic gold.'

As a die-hard Canadian sports enthusiast, I am not sure which of those sentences hits harder, cuts deeper or will sting longer. It has been a tough few months.

Sure, the Toronto Blue Jays reaching the World Series and both Canadian national hockey teams skating into Olympic gold medal games are accomplishments in their own right. But coming close is just not the same as finishing the job. For elite athletes, silver rarely softens the blow.

Good for the Dodgers and their $500 million payroll. They bought another championship.

Good for the Americans, who showed that after nearly 50 years they finally learned how to win a hockey tournament on the sport's biggest stage.

Say what you will about Donald Trump. Your opinion is likely shared by at least 41.65 million other Canadians.

But when the President of the United States calls to congratulate you after your country's first Olympic gold medal in 46 years, that is a moment you never forget. Did one of the world's most powerful individuals say something regrettable and derogatory toward women during that conversation? Yes. Unfortunately, that has become routine behaviour, delivered publicly and unapologetically.

In March, as we continue celebrating International Women's Day, we at *Game On* choose to spotlight the accomplishments of women in and around sport rather than reduce them to afterthoughts.

The United States women's team delivered a dominant performance at the 2026 Winter Olympics. Goaltender Aerin Frankel was spectacular, turning aside 97 of 99 shots while recording three shutouts. Her numbers rivalled — and in many ways surpassed — those of Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Connor Hellebuyck.

Yes, the American women allowed fewer shots, but they controlled games in a way neither side managed in the men's tournament.

USA Hockey is growing – and quickly. Participation numbers continue to rise south of the 49th parallel, and February's Olympic showcase will only accelerate that momentum in a country long dominated by the other three traditional "big four" sports.

For Canada, near misses still matter. The Blue Jays pushed baseball's brightest star to the very brink. Our women and men came agonizingly close to Olympic gold.

Silver medals shine. Not like gold – but brightly enough to remind competitors how close they were. And sometimes, coming up an inch short is exactly what fuels the next championship run.

CARTER BROOKS,
Editor-in-Chief



Photo by James Carey Lauder



JOSH MORRISSEY

44

DEFENCE // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'0" // 195 POUNDS

BORN MAR. 28, 1995 // CALGARY, ALTA.

2025-26 TEAM: WINNIPEG JETS

2025-26 SEASON STATS

WINNIPEG JETS

56
GAMES

10
GOALS

42
POINTS

The 2025-26 season has not started as well as recent years for the Winnipeg Jets, but it has nothing to do with the play of the team's top defenceman. Josh Morrissey, now 30 years old, is well into his 10th NHL campaign and is once again truly performing at Norris Trophy caliber pace.

With 10 goals and 42 points in the first 56 games, Morrissey has once again put Cale Makar and the NHL on watch when it comes to offensive production. In terms of all-round defence, the Jets' alternate captain surely has the competition beat.

Having been challenged by his former head coach Rick Bowness to be in the Norris Trophy conversation at season's end during his first year coaching the Jets, Morrissey took that summons to heart and has displayed his abilities ever since.

Sadly, despite making Team Canada and attending his first Winter Olympic Games, Morrissey was hurt early into Canada's first game and was forced to watch his team play out the remainder of the tournament from the sidelines - much like that of his 4 Nations Face-Off experience.



Photos by Scott Stroh and James Carey Lauder

JETS HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT

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- DEVELOPING DEFENCE (U13)
- FORWARD SPECIALIZATION (U13)





hockey for all centre

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ROWYN RINGOR

7

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'4"

BORN SEPTEMBER 12, 2006 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY (NCAA D-1)

2024-25 SEASON STATS

POST UNIVERSITY (NCAA D-1)

37 GAMES

10 GOALS

26 POINTS

A former member of U18 Team Manitoba and a star at the RINK Hockey Academy U18 in Winnipeg (only two games due to the COVID cancellations), Shattuck St. Mary's U19 and Balmoral Hall, Ringor started her collegiate career at Post University in 2024 where she had a tremendous season. She was named New England Women's Hockey Association Rookie of the Year, made the All-Rookie Team and the league's Second All-Star Team. After that one year at Post, however, she transferred to Robert Morris University near Pittsburgh and is off to a fine start. In her first 24 games in the Atlantic Hockey Association, she had three goals and 12 points. According to former BH assistant coach Regan Boulton, "On the ice, Rowyn is small, but mighty and is not afraid to battle. She played in every situation on the ice with us, whether it was power-play or penalty kill, and she was successful in all areas."

Photos courtesy of the NCAA



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DARIAN SINCLAIR

66

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'10"

BORN JULY 26, 2005 // PEGUIS, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: PEGUIS JUNIORS (KJHL)

2024-25 SEASON STATS

ONTARIO JR. REIGN (USPHL PREMIER)
BAKERSFIELD ROUGHNECKS (USPHL PREMIER)

30 GAMES

13 GOALS

28 POINTS

For Peguis Juniors head coach Marty Favel, the return of Darian Sinclair has been one of the best things to happen to his team this season. "He was with us a couple of years ago but decided to go down to California and pursue the game down there. I guess he was getting bumped around a little bit down there, involved in some trades, and he didn't really care for it. So, he came back late last year, joined us this year and he's been outstanding. He's so fast and so shifty, one second he's here, and the next he's gone." A former defenceman, Sinclair had 30 goals and 45 points in his first 20 games as a forward this season -- and led the league in scoring. A former star D-man with the U15, U17 and U18 AAA Interlake Lightning, Sinclair had 30 points in 21 games with Peguis back in 2023-24.



Photos by Kelly Jacobson

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ZACH WHITECLOUD

28

DEFENCE // SHOOTS RIGHT // 6'3"

BORN NOVEMBER 28, 1996 // BRANDON, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: CALGARY FLAMES (NHL)

2024-25 SEASON STATS

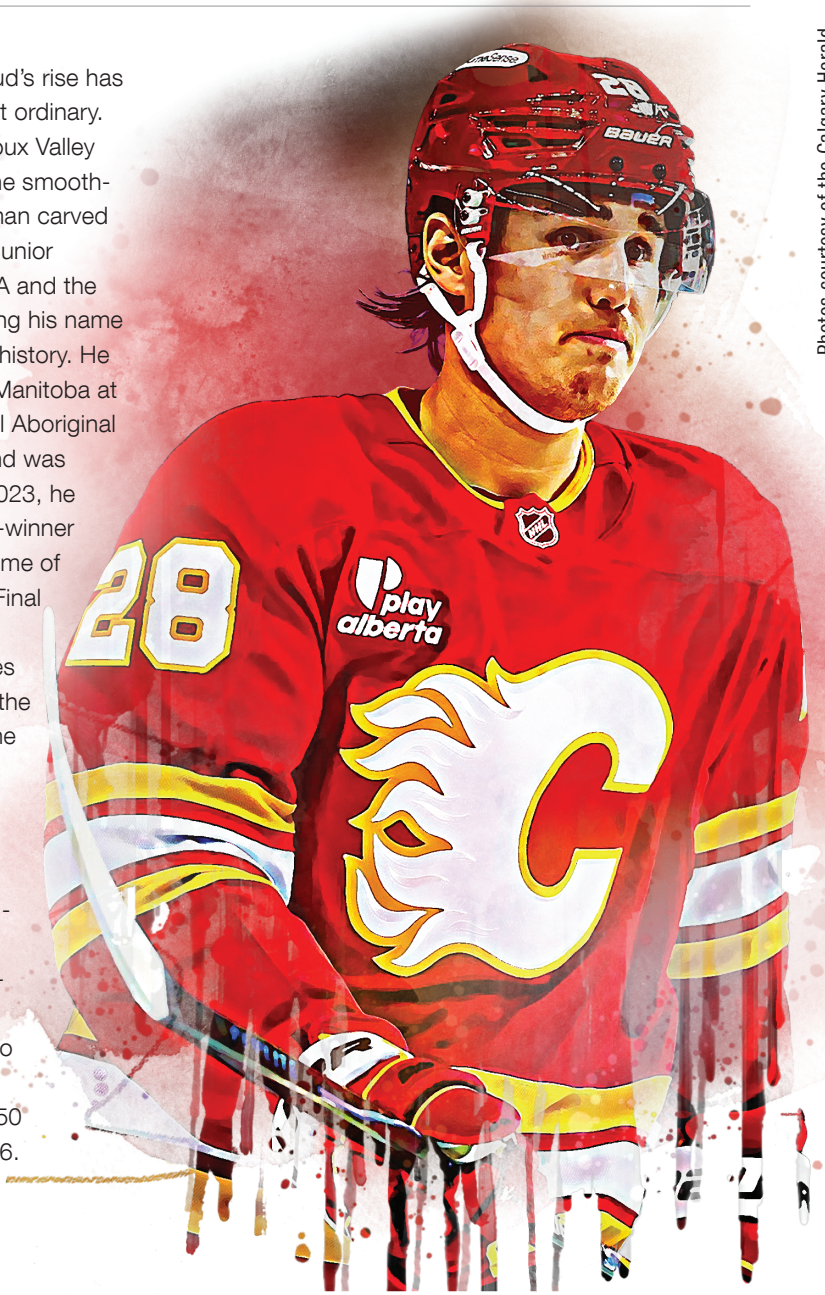
VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS (NHL)

74
GAMES

4
GOALS

13
POINTS

Zach Whitecloud's rise has been anything but ordinary. Raised on the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, the smooth-skating defenceman carved his path through junior hockey, the NCAA and the AHL before etching his name into Stanley Cup history. He played for Team Manitoba at the 2014 National Aboriginal Championship and was outstanding. In 2023, he scored the game-winner in the opening game of the Stanley Cup Final and added three points in the series to help Vegas lift the Cup. Traded to the Calgary Flames in January, Whitecloud arrived in Calgary as a proven, hard-nosed blueliner who plays a near-perfect defensive game. He had two goals and eight points in his first 50 games of 2025-26.



Photos courtesy of the Calgary Herald

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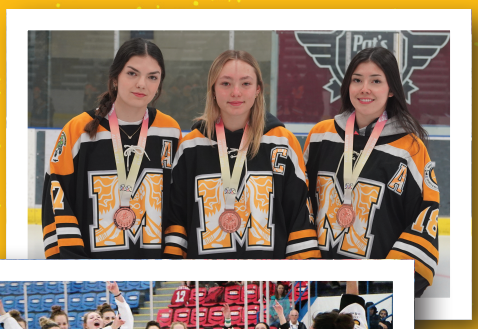
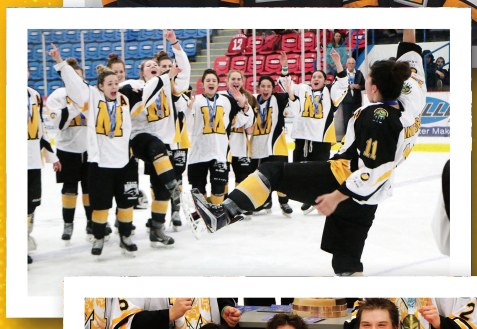
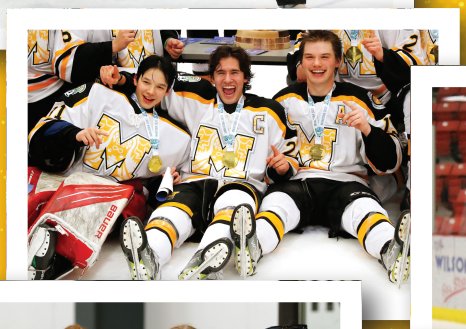




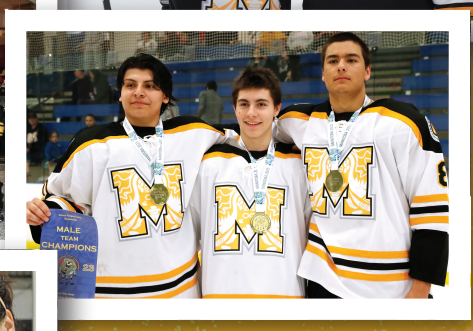
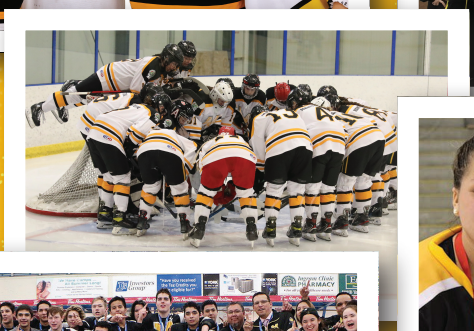




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KATI TABIN

9

DEFENDER // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'8"

BORN APRIL 21, 1997 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: MONTREAL VICTOIRE (PWHL)

2024-25 SEASON STATS

MONTREAL VICTOIRE (PWHL)

24
GAMES

4
GOALS

8
POINTS

Tabin spent three years as a Blazer from the 2012-13 season to the 2014-15 campaign, all in the Junior Women's League. She then spent four years at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Conn., and was the Bobcats' captain in her senior year. She was out of hockey for a year, before spending part of a season with the Connecticut Whale of the old PWF in 2021-22 and then played a full season with the PWF's Toronto Six before joining Montreal for her first season in the PWHL in 2023. This year, she has a goal and three assists in her first 11 games with the PWHL's first-place Victoire. A tall, fast and defensive-minded defender, the 28-year-old Tabin just finished playing for Team Canada at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Cortina-Milano, Italy.



Photos courtesy of the PWHL

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KNOX BURTON

20

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'3"

BORN SEPTEMBER 22, 2009 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: PMHA BUFFALOES (CSSHL U18 PREP)

2024-25 SEASON STATS

RINK HOCKEY ACADEMY (CSSHL U17 PREP)

32
GAMES

23
GOALS

56
POINTS

When Knox Burton decided to leave the RINK Hockey Academy in Winnipeg and enroll at Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, it was good news for Buffaloes' U18 Prep head coach Anthony Florentino. "Knoxy works hard," said Florentino. "I think there's a lot of potential there." No kidding. After a superb season with the U17 Prep team at the RINK last year, Burton has come to Pilot Mound and ripped it up. The former Winnipeg Wild star had 18 goals and 32 points in his first 24 CSSHL U18 Prep games as a 16-year-old (and even played two games for the MJHL's Selkirk Steelers). He was selected by the Prince Albert Raiders in the WHL U15 Draft. "He's a big body," said Florentino. "He's a game changer and he logs a lot of minutes for us. When he's going, our team's going. We just want to see him keep getting better every day. I think he's going to have a very bright future."



Photos courtesy Jordan Martin and the CSSHL

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SCAN ME



KALEN REYNOLDS

18

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'5" // 220 POUNDS

BORN JANUARY 7, 2004 // WINNIPEG, MAN

2025-26 TEAM: RIVER EAST ROYAL KNIGHTS (MMJHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

FORWARD

40
GAMES PLAYED

22
GOALS

53
POINTS

For Kalen Reynolds, the 2025-26 River East Royal Knights is a brotherhood. Having doubled the team's win totals from the past two seasons back in January, the results are also something to behold.

"The team is almost like a little family, we're all brothers," Reynolds told Game On. "The bond we have is a big reason why our success has been at a higher level. We push each other to a high level of play because we all know the team's potential, and that we can compete with any team in the league."

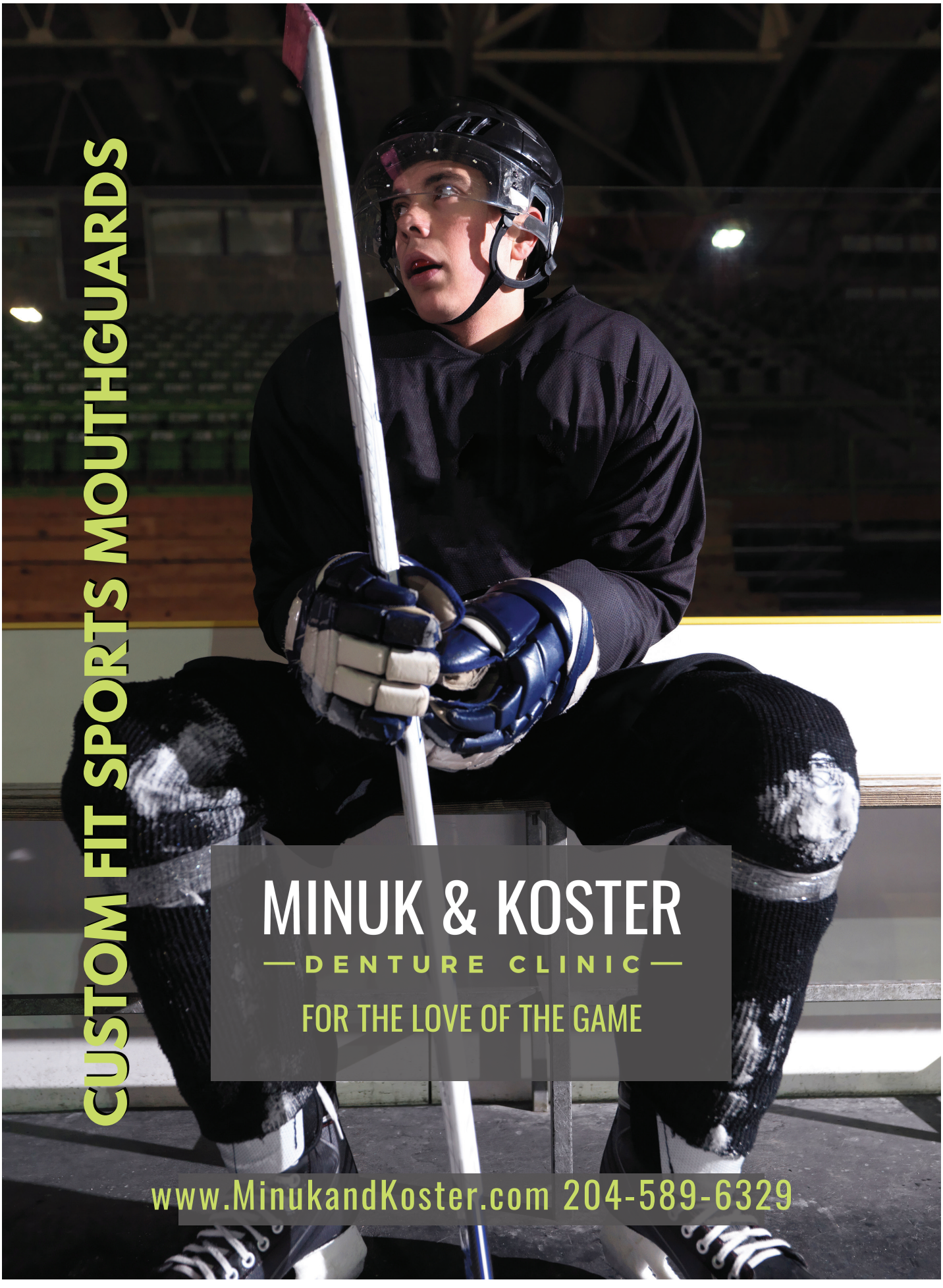
According to the veteran forward, the goal this spring is a lengthy postseason run. And the team's alternate captain will help make that happen any way he can.

"Having once been the youngest on the team definitely showed me what a good leader should and shouldn't do, and helped me look up to the older guys. That is the type of captain and person I would like to be."

"We can compete and beat any team if we play authentic Knights hockey. The end goal is obviously to win the championship, which I have no doubt that we are capable of doing just that."



Photos by Dave Willson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MARLEN EDWARDS

11

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'11"

BORN SEPTEMBER 19, 2006 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2025-26 TEAM: NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS (MJHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

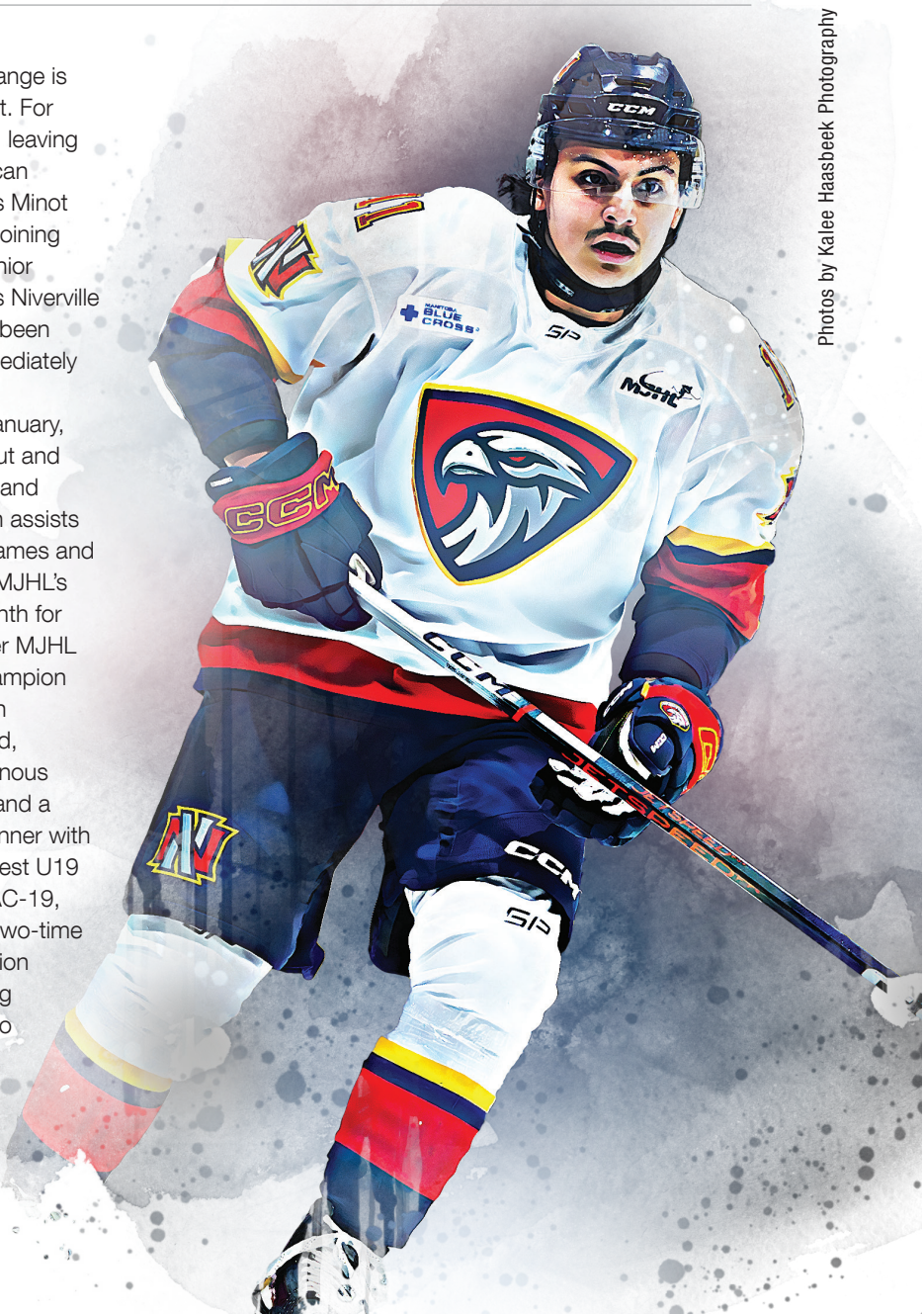
NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS

11
GAMES

13
GOALS

22
POINTS

They say a change is as good as a rest. For Marlen Edwards, leaving the North American Hockey League's Minot Minotauros and joining the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Niverville Nighthawks has been even better. Immediately upon joining the Nighthawks in January, Edwards went out and scored 12 goals and dished out seven assists in his first nine games and was named the MJHL's Player of the Month for January. A former MJHL Turnbull Cup champion with the Northern Manitoba Blizzard, captain of Indigenous Team Manitoba and a bronze medal winner with Team Canada West U19 at the 2025 WJAC-19, Edwards was a two-time MU18HL champion with the Winnipeg Wild. He was also a member of the 2023-24 MJHL All-Rookie team.



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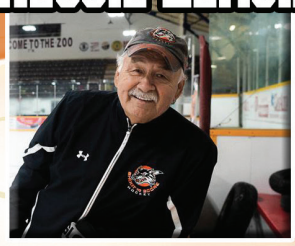
Reggie Leach



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SPEED MYTHS BUSTED!

Welcome back to The Inside Edge! Today we explore SPEED MYTHS. Have you ever had a coach say, "You will never get faster," or heard a coach say, "They need to work on their first-step quickness"? Let's dive into some of the Top 3 speed myths.

MYTH #1: "YOU'RE TOO OLD."

At what age does speed peak? As of Jan 15, 2026, the fastest skater in the NHL is 29-year-old Connor McDavid (24.61 mph). The fastest Winnipeg Jet is 32-year-old Mark Scheifele (23.44 mph/ ranked 18th in the league). The average age of the Top 10 NHL speedsters is 26. As a coach, player and parent, remember the age of the player you are talking to. Speed is an acquired skill over time. Most athletes can hold their top end speed between the ages of 30-35, before it starts to decline. Unless you are in your mid to late 30s, chances are you can still improve your speed on the ice.

MYTH #2: "YOU NEED FIRST STEP QUICKNESS."

If one of the objectives of the game is to get in and out of space as quickly as possible, wouldn't the goal be to PROJECT the body in space? Covering space over time is dictated by stride frequency x stride length. Which of the two is more important? Neither, as they are both needed to go fast. The ELITE 8 in the NHL have an amazing stride length, and at the same time display top-end stride frequency. The slower skaters at the opposite end of the speed spectrum are the ones that usually are good at one of the traits, but weak in another. What you really need is stride frequency and stride length.



MYTH #3: "YOU ARE BORN WITH OR WITHOUT SPEED."

Speed is an acquired learned skill. Speed is a trained physiological response to stress to the body. One of the main stressors is on the central nervous system that develops neural fatigue in fast movements. Another main stressor is the energy management system. Short, explosive, maximal effort bursts need to be part of a speed program for the nervous system and ATP-CP energy system to develop and maximize. Shapes are the positions athletes establish before and after they move, and patterns are how they move between these shapes. This is called technique. Most coaches understand that technique matters. With a solid on-ice skills coach and a program that addresses shapes and patterns, speed will improve. Everyone has a genetic limit. The question is how close can you get to that ceiling due to good coaching and a solid work ethic?



IN CLOSING:

If the fastest Winnipeg Jet is 32 years old, and if speed is an acquired learned skill, that demands a trained physiological response from the energy and nervous systems, does it not make sense that you can always get faster? Speed is a mentality that demands effort and training principles that acquire specific shapes and patterns. It is never too late! Surround yourself with an experienced speed coach, an on-ice coach, and be prepared to work.

Thank you for your time. Until next time... think fast, be fast.

Photos by James Carey Lauder

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SHOULDER INJURIES PART II

Expanding on shoulder injuries from last month's column, one cannot ignore the complexity and fascinating architecture of the shoulder joint. For the context of the segment, the focus will be on the glenohumeral joint (i.e. true shoulder joint) with respect to its mobility and the muscles that power actions.

The shoulder joint is extremely mobile and allows for flexion/extension, adduction/abduction and internal/external rotation. Flexion occurs when we move our arm directly in front of our body and extension when the arm moves straight backward. Abduction is when we lift our arm to the side and adduction when it moves back beside our body. For internal and external rotation, picture a player standing at the face-off circle with both hands on his/her stick. For the top hand of his/her stick, the shoulder would be internally rotated while the shoulder of the bottom hand would be externally rotated. Shoulder mobility is imperative for execution of several hockey skills for both players and goalies alike. Whether it's moving your shoulder quickly to shoot a puck at 80 miles/hour or slowly pushing a lot of weight on the bench press, you are relying on your muscles to make this happen.

Did you know that a total of 10 muscles cross your shoulder joint to power the movements described above? The muscles include the deltoid, pectoralis major, biceps brachii, triceps brachii, coracobrachialis, teres major, latissimus dorsi, as well as the four rotator cuff muscles. The rotator cuff muscles are supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor and subscapularis. The deltoid muscle (i.e. big cap you feel over your shoulder) powers flexion, extension and abduction. The pectoralis major (i.e. largest chest muscle) can flex, adduct and internally rotate (along with subscapularis) your upper arm. Latissimus dorsi and teres major are responsible for adduction. Biceps brachii and coracobrachialis cause flexion at the shoulder while triceps brachii powers extension. The rotator cuff muscles form a 'cuff' around the shoulder and power the first 10 degrees of abduction (supraspinatus), internal rotation (subscapularis), and external rotation (infraspinatus, teres minor) of the shoulder. However, these are not all the muscles required to move the shoulder, and several act on the scapula (shoulder blade) to keep our shoulder stable and mobile. These will be covered in the next edition.

So, why the anatomy lesson? As discussed in the last edition, shoulder injuries are very common in the sport of hockey. It's important to understand the fascinating complexity of this highly mobile joint that has very little bony stability to appreciate the importance of well-balanced shoulder strength to avoid or recover from shoulder injury.

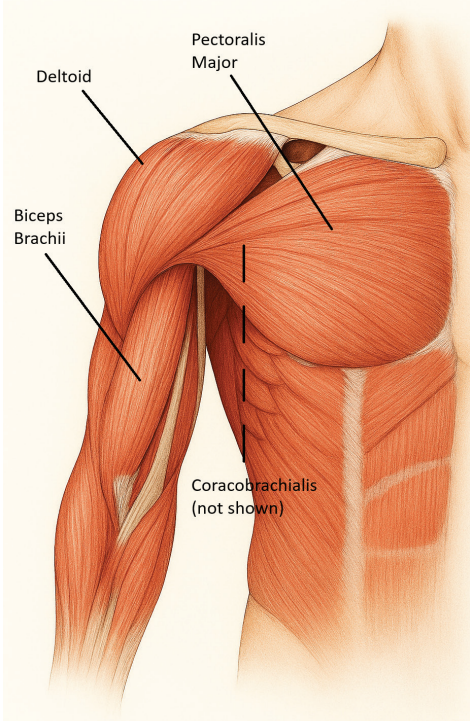

FIGURE 1. ANTERIOR VIEW OF THE SHOULDER INCLUDING DELTOID, PECTORALIS MAJOR, AND BICEPS BRACHII MUSCLES.

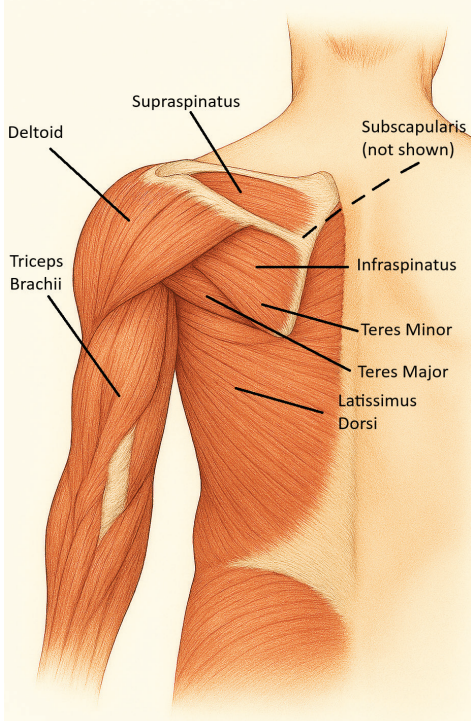

FIGURE 2. POSTERIOR VIEW OF THE SHOULDER INCLUDING THE DELTOID, SUPRASPINATUS, INFRASPINATUS, TERES MINOR, TERES MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII AND LATISSIMUS DORSI MUSCLES.

Illustrations provided by Dr. Jeff Leiter

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AS TOLD TO CARTER BROOKS

Photos courtesy of James Carey Lauder, Rusty Barton, MCI, the Winnipeg Jets, Aikens Lake Wilderness Lodge and Lake of the Woods Sports Headquarters

LIFE ON THE ICE

THE WINNIPEG JETS found something steady and dependable when they acquired Alex Iafallo by way of trade in 2023: a quiet, adaptable forward capable of fitting into nearly any role asked of him.

Since arriving in Winnipeg, the hardworking, two-way winger has done exactly that, earning the trust of coaches and teammates alike, while carving out a meaningful place within the club's tight-knit core. Last spring, Iafallo doubled down on his commitment to the organization, signing a three-year extension to remain in Manitoba — a decision that clearly felt natural for a player whose lifestyle so perfectly mirrors the heartbeat of the province.

Away from the hustle and bustle of the NHL schedule, Iafallo's happiest moments often come far from the rink. Raised in a small farming community, his love for the outdoors has followed him throughout every stop of his hockey carrer. Manitoba's never-ending lakes, rivers and wide-open spaces fit that bill. Whether it's fall mornings boating on the Red River, long days out ice fishing on Lake Winnipeg or quiet trips north or south with teammates, the 32-year-old has embraced life on the frozen water just as much as life on a flooded sheet of ice.

During February's Olympic break, that passion for the outdoors intersected perfectly with hockey. After returning home from a surfing trip in Costa Rica with Jonathan Toews, Iafallo watched the Olympic gold medal game from the warmth of an ice fishing shack at 7:00 a.m., joined by Jets teammate and fellow American, Neal Pionk.

Across from them sat Canadian teammates Cole Perfetti and Morgan Barron, who looked on in disbelief as Connor Hellebuyck — another member of Winnipeg's growing fishing circle — delivered a spectacular performance to backstop the United States to gold. For Iafallo, it was a fitting way to take in the biggest game on the international stage: surrounded by teammates, good company and a frozen lake stretching endlessly outside the window.

From adapting to new roles on the ice to finding peace on frozen waters off it, Iafallo has quietly built a life that feels perfectly suited to Winnipeg. *Game On Magazine* editor-in-chief Carter Brooks sat down with Iafallo to chat all things hockey, fishing, life in Manitoba and what makes his time with the Jets feel like home.



ALEX IAFALLO

HEIGHT / 6'0"

WEIGHT / 200 POUNDS

AGE / 32 YEARS OLD

BORN / DECEMBER 21, 1993

FROM / EDEN, NEW YORK

POSITION / FORWARD

SHOOTS / LEFT

DRAFTED / UNDRAFTED







YOU SPENT A FEW YEARS PLAYING IN FARGO AND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA-DULUTH. SO THIS LOCATION/WEATHER ISN'T ALL THAT NEW TO YOU, RIGHT?

"Yeah, it's just like everywhere else I've played, really. It's kind of like Fargo. You know, I've played there and played in Duluth – It's the same climate. Obviously, it's a little colder up here. You get a little bit more wind. The wind chill is a bit stronger, but you've got to roll with the punches and have fun wherever you are. I've been loving my time here. I've been in the Midwest for a pretty good amount of time, well, obviously besides my time in L.A. before the trade."

HAVE YOU FINALLY COME AROUND TO CELSIUS VERSUS FAHRENHEIT? HAVE YOU FIGURED THAT OUT YET?

"It's still growing. And I know, it's been a few years... I mean, I wish I could have learned that when I was a kid. It's like languages. When you're a kid, everything is easier to pick up. But the problem is that I see it differently everywhere – well, maybe it's a help? I really don't know. So, in my car it's Fahrenheit, but then on my phone I see Celsius. But you figure it out eventually, you kind of learn what correlates to what."

I REMEMBER OUR FIRST ZOOM CALL WITH YOU AFTER THE TRADE. YOU SAID YOU WERE UP IN THE MOUNTAINS WHEN YOU GOT THAT CALL. CAN YOU TELL ME A BIT MORE ABOUT THAT EXPERIENCE?

"Oh, for sure. It was something. I didn't have any service. I was gone off, like almost by Yosemite in the area around that park. I was with two of my buddies and I didn't have any cell service. My buddy had service and he got this call from my mom. So she called him and then we had to sort it all out. I had to answer a bunch of calls, I went home to take care of everything. It ended up cutting the trip short, but it was alright!"

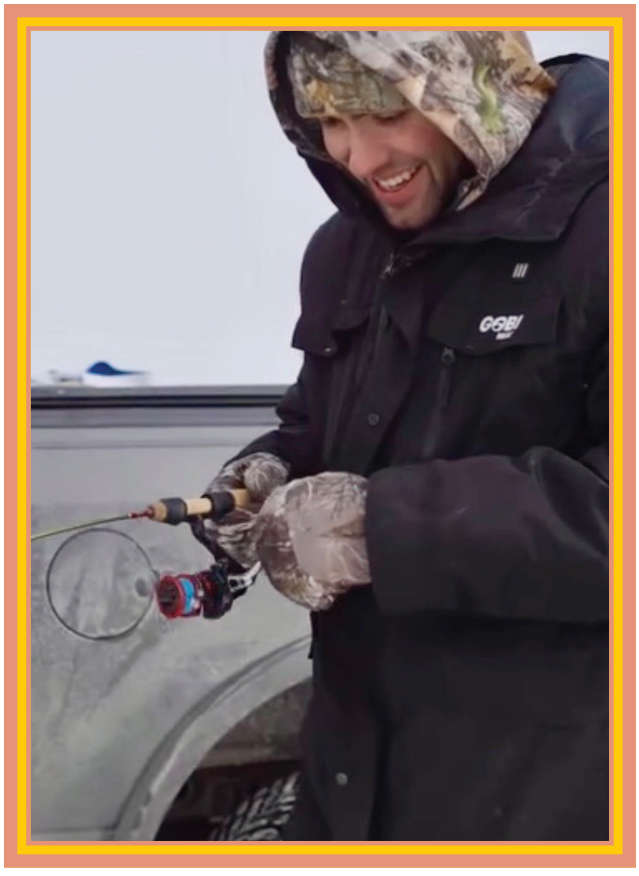
YOU'VE BEEN IN WINNIPEG FOR A FEW YEARS NOW. HAVE YOU COME TO FIND ANY HOT SPOTS THAT YOU LIKE – WHETHER IT'S INDOORS OR OUTDOORS?

"Oh yeah. The Red River. Lake Winnipeg too. Pretty much anywhere I've been here within the province, the fishing has been awesome. I see why so many Americans come up here every summer. It's a great community too. Some of us try to go down south, too. There's some great people down there – I've been out fishing down there too. A lot of great outdoors stuff to do if you head a bit south as well."

HAVE YOU FOUND YOUR HONEY HOLE? ANY CERTAIN LOCATION WE CAN FIND YOU?

"A secret? No, not really. But a couple honey holes, yeah. I don't think that I can spread that around though. During the winter time here though I've been ice fishing a lot. Especially when we had all of those days coming out of





ALEX'S OTHER TRUE LOVE: FISHING.



the Olympic break. Honestly, I think I've been out fishing every day – we've been going up north, kind of near Selkirk. I love it here, man. I'm actually heading out on the water after practice here today too."

YOU'RE GOING TODAY? WHO ARE YOU GOING WITH? WHO DO YOU USUALLY GO WITH?

"Oh, yeah. I'm not kidding. We're heading right out there soon as I'm done here with you. It's always a small little group of us. Helle loves it, KC, Samby, Fetts, Pionk... Bear has come out with us a few times too. Usually it's a different group every couple days. There are a lot of guys who actually get out a fair bit. Kyle especially, and Helle too - Whoever has the time. It's like just come on out. And obviously really nice just being with the boys. We've met a bunch of people out there as well. But everyone is nice. It's a great community."

YOU TALK ABOUT SURFING IN COSTA RICA, HIKING IN THE MOUTAINS DURING THE OFFSEASON, ICE FISHING ALL WINTER IN WINNIPEG... WHERE DID THIS LOVE FOR THE OUTDOORS COME FROM?

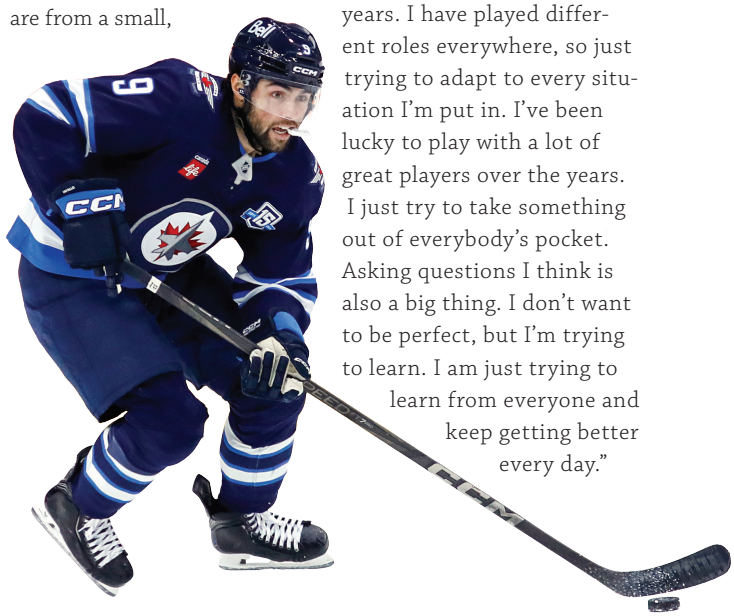
"I just always used to spend my time outside as a kid. We are from a small, farming town. So maybe that's where it came from? I actually don't know. It's not like we were forced to be outside or anything. But for me, I'm kind of a quiet guy. And it's just nice to get away and not think about things – or maybe think about things a bit more differently. The outdoors lets me do that."

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT WINNIPEG, THE JETS AND HOCKEY FANS UP HERE IN CANADA THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHEN PLAYING FOR THE KINGS?

"It's such a great city for hockey. The team is amazing. And it is an amazing organization, obviously. I just can't say enough about everybody here. The city itself, the fans, the atmosphere is unbelievable in the rink. Regular season is great, but obviously the playoffs too with the whiteout, it's nuts. It's a blast playing here. You can feel it in the locker room."

YOU'RE WELL KNOWN AS A STRONG TWO-WAY PLAYER. HOW DID YOU BUILD SUCH A TRUST IN YOUR COACHES TO PLAY YOU IN ALL SITUATIONS?

"I learned a lot over all the years. I have played different roles everywhere, so just trying to adapt to every situation I'm put in. I've been lucky to play with a lot of great players over the years. I just try to take something out of everybody's pocket. Asking questions I think is also a big thing. I don't want to be perfect, but I'm trying to learn. I am just trying to learn from everyone and keep getting better every day."



Thrown Under the Bus

BY A.I.

WHO HAS THE WORST TASTE IN MUSIC?
Let's go with Gabe.

WORST KARAOKE SINGER?
Pionk, for sure.

WHO THINKS HE HAS THE NICEST CAR?
Well, everybody's car is just pretty dirty. Maybe Coms.

WHO WOULDN'T SURVIVE CAMPING TWO NIGHTS WITH YOU?
Pearson.

WHO IS THE GUY YOU DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT SITTING BESIDE ON THE BUS/PLANE?
I guess the coaches… just kidding.

WHO THINKS HE'S FUNNIER THAN HE IS?
Pionk.

WHO WOULD GET KICKED OFF A REALITY SHOW FIRST?
KC maybe? He's quiet.

WHO COMPLAINS ABOUT THE WEATHER ALL THE TIME?
Fleury.

WHO WOULD GET LOST IN THE WOODS FIRST?
Pearson, maybe Goose.

WHO IS THE WORST FISHERMAN?
Depends on the day. Samberg.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO FORGET SOMETHING AT THE RINK?
Tazer.

WHO IS THE WORST TRASH TALKING TEAMMATE?
Koepper.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LILLIAN WANG AT SOUTHDALE ARENA

FROM FIRST STEPS TO FIRST LINE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Scott Taylor and Jennifer Davis-Maciura

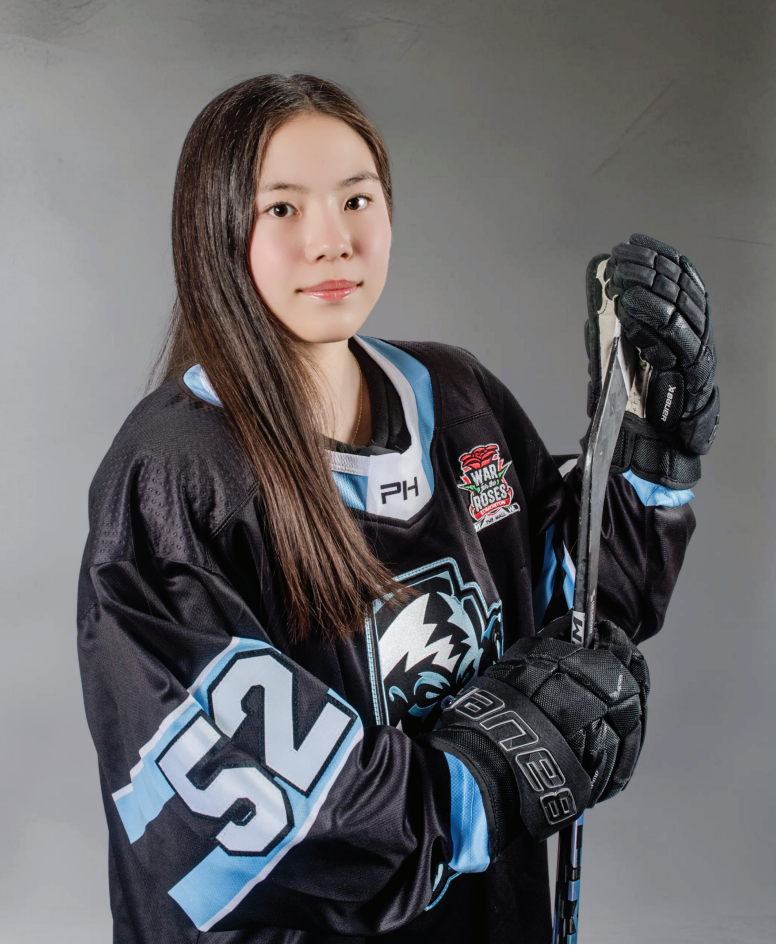
HOW LILLIAN WANG FOUND HOCKEY AND HOW HOCKEY, THROUGH PROGRAMS LIKE FIRST SHIFT AT THE HOCKEY FOR ALL CENTRE, IS LEARNING TO FIND NEW CANADIANS

When Lillian Wang steps onto the ice now, she does it with the easy confidence of a player who knows she belongs.

The 13-year-old Grade 8 student skates for the Winnipeg AAA Avros Red and attends the Hockey Academy at Churchill High School, where her days begin with early-morning ice and dryland before classes even start. She calls herself a 200-foot player, someone who sets the pace of a game, skates well, and likes to set up plays.

It looks, from the outside, like a straightforward hockey story: a talented kid, a steady climb through the system, a clear set of goals — maybe even an NCAA scholarship one day.

But the path that brought Lillian to this point was



LILLIAN WITH MJI TEAM TOBA, WHICH REPRESENTED MANITOBA AT THE WAR OF THE ROSES TOURNAMENT AT WEST EDMONTON MALL IN JULY OF 2025 THE TEAM WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP FOR MANITOBA FOR THE FIRST TIME AND LILLIAN SCORED THE ONLY GOAL IN THE GOLD MEDAL GAME

anything but straightforward, especially for a family that arrived in Canada from China with no background in the sport and no roadmap for how to get a child into hockey.

"I started skating when I was around five," Lillian said. "My parents put me into a lot of sports because I was really shy. I wasn't talking much. I did soccer, basketball, dance. Then I started skating at public skating, and they saw I could get across the ice pretty quickly."

Her parents couldn't skate. They weren't hockey people. But they could see that their quiet daughter was comfortable on the ice. They signed her up in their St. Vital area community centre, and she began in Timbits hockey, playing in the Dakota League.

From there, her progress accelerated: A2 in U9 after missing A1 tryouts because the family didn't even know tryouts were a thing, then A1 in U11, AA with the Bruins at U13, and now AAA with Avros Red, plus Churchill Hockey Academy.

"Lillian is in her second year at the hockey academy, and she's an excellent addition to our program," said Churchill Phys. Ed specialist and hockey academy instructor Jesse Klym. "She is hard working, focused and determined to get better each time she steps onto the ice or into the weight room," Klym said. "As a student, she is responsible and respected by all of her classmates. Academically, she is high achieving and as a friend she is well liked by all of her peers."

For Lillian, school is important, but hockey is a passion.

"I had to give up some other sports in order to excel at hockey," she said. "I used to do dance, do gymnastics, play the piano. But hockey has been a lot lately."

She doesn't mind. She still loves school. She likes snowboarding in the winter and walking in nature. And she likes being part of a team.

"I love my teammates," she said. "They're really inclusive."

That word — inclusive — matters more than she probably realizes.

For her father, Kun Zhong, the memory of those first steps into hockey is still vivid, and still a little painful.

The family came to Canada in 2003. Their son, Andrew, was six-and-a-half years older than Lillian and never played hockey. He played football instead, starting when he was five. Zhong and his wife didn't know how hockey worked. They assumed, logically, that a child needed to learn to skate before registering for hockey, so they put Andrew into public skating lessons.

"That's not a very intensive training," Zhong said. "So, he progressed very slowly. After a year or two he could skate, but not very well. Then when we thought about hockey, we realized the kids his age were already so advanced. He lost confidence. He said, 'Dad, I'm not going to play hockey. I only want to play football.'"

The family didn't know what they didn't know — and by the time they did, it felt like it was too late.

When Lillian came along, they were determined not to repeat the mistake. But even then, the learning curve was steep.

"We started to look for resources," Zhong said. "As soon as she could stand on the ice, we tried to register her."

The first practice is a story the family still laughs about. They thought they were taking their daughter to a skating lesson, not a hockey practice. They showed up with no equipment



LILLIAN WANG

— just a winter jacket, snow pants and mittens. Every other kid had full gear.

"We got an email from the coach that said, 'We're going to have our first skate of the season,'" Zhong recalled. "We didn't even know it was a team practice. We thought it was just going out skating.

"So we dressed her up in her coat and jeans. She didn't have a helmet. No hockey gloves, just mittens. She didn't even have a stick."

The coach lent them gloves and a stick and after that first practice, the family went straight to Sportchek and bought everything they needed.

"That shows how little knowledge we had about hockey," Zhong said.

It didn't stop there. They didn't know how equipment should fit. They didn't know the difference between a hockey helmet and a football helmet. They didn't know girls wore jills instead of cups. They didn't even know skates needed to be sharpened.

"The first year, she skated the whole season and we never sharpened the blades once," Zhong said, laughing. "They were still brand new at the end."

More confusing than the equipment was the system itself.

"Football registration is simple," Zhong said. "Each area has its own team. There are no tryouts for football. You just go and play. Hockey is different. There are community clubs, catchment areas, different teams, tryouts. There is no one centralized place to find all the information. If you are new, it is very, very confusing."

That confusion is exactly what programs like First Shift and people like their friend Allan Chan along with Ron Cantiveros and Ganni Maan at Winnipeg's hockey for all centre are trying to fix.

The idea is simple: remove the barriers that keep families — especially new Canadian families — from even trying hockey. That means providing equipment, clear information, and a low-pressure entry point into the game. It means making sure a family doesn't have to learn everything the hard way, one expensive mistake at a time.

"If we had known about those kinds of programs when my son was young, he would have played," Zhong said. "One hundred per cent."

Zhong is a social worker by training. He understands systems, and he understands how intimidating they can be when you don't speak the language — literally or culturally. He also understands what hockey has done for his daughter.

When Lilian was little, she barely spoke. At home the family spoke Mandarin. Outside, everything was English. She was quiet, withdrawn, unsure.

"We were worried," Zhong said. "Even the coaches said she was very quiet. She didn't talk to anybody."

Sports were supposed to help her socialize. Hockey did more than that.

"Now she is very social," he said. "We really appreciate how the sport changed her — not her personality, but her social skills."

They learned the game together. Lillian learned edge work. Zhong learned what edge work was. They watched other players. They asked questions. They figured it out.



LILLIAN WITH U15 AAA AVROS RED

Somewhere along the way, Zhong fell in love with hockey himself.

"I like the pace," he said. "It's fast. It's intense. The shifts change all the time. Everybody is full of energy."

Lillian, for her part, just plays.

Through the Churchill Hockey Academy, she goes to Southdale Arena every school day morning. For Grade 8 students, the day starts around 9 a.m., depending on whether it's ice or weights. She plays a lot of hockey, does well in school and is turning 14 this year. She has long-term dreams and short-term goals.

"Long term, I'd love to get a full scholarship to an NCAA school," she said. "Short term, I just want to help my team more. Get more points. Set up more plays."

If you didn't know her story, you might think she's just another talented Winnipeg kid climbing the hockey ladder.

But her father knows better.

He knows how close they came to missing it entirely.

And he knows how many other families are standing right now where they once stood — at the edge of the rink, looking in, not sure how to open the door.

"That's why these programs are so important," Zhong said. "Hockey is a great game. But you must show people how to start."



WINNIPEG'S LARISSA PAGDATO PLAYING FOR TEAM PHILIPPINES AT THE 2025 SEA GAMES

FROM WINNIPEG TO THE WORLD STAGE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by James Carey Lauder and courtesy of Larry Pagdato

WINNIPEG'S LARISSA PAGDATO, A TRUE NORTH YOUTH FOUNDATION AND FIRST SHIFT COACH, HAS TAKEN A LONG, WINDING ROAD TO A SPOT ON THE PHILIPPINES WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM.

When Larissa Pagdato pulled on a Team Philippines jersey in Bangkok back in December, she wasn't just representing a country at the Southeast Asian Games — she was carrying a family story, a cultural identity, and a hockey journey that began far from tropical climates and international arenas.

At 25, the Winnipeg-born forward has already lived several athletic lives: minor hockey kid in South Winnipeg, junior and university player, coach and mentor, athletic therapy graduate, soon-to-be law student and now international hockey player for one of the fastest-growing programs in the sport. And in March, when she steps onto the ice in Estonia for the IIHF Women's World Championship Division 3B tournament, she'll be part of another first — Team Philippines' debut on the official world stage.

"It still feels kind of surreal," Pagdato said. "If you had told me a few years ago that I'd be playing international hockey in Thailand and then Estonia, I don't think I would have believed you."

A TOURNAMENT, A BREAKTHROUGH

Team Philippines finished second at the 2025 SEA Games in Bangkok, a tournament that featured Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. The Filipinas dropped their opener 13–0 to powerhouse Thailand, then rebounded with wins over Singapore and Malaysia before beating Singapore again in the semifinal. Another loss to Thailand in the gold medal game sealed a silver medal — a massive step forward for a young program.

"Oh yeah, Thailand is a powerhouse," Pagdato said with a laugh. "They play in a division above us in the IIHF system. They're really, really good."

For the Philippines, the SEA Games were more than a medal opportunity. They were a proving ground — a sign that the program is ready to move forward in the IIHF.



LARISSA PLAYING AGAINST SINGAPORE



PAGDATO, MIDDLE, SCORES FOR TEAM PHILIPPINES

That next step comes in March, when the team travels to Estonia for the IIHF's Division 3B Worlds. It will be their first official appearance in IIHF world championship play. If they win, they move up to Division 3A.

"It's exciting and also kind of unknown," said Pagdato, who got loads of icetime by playing both centre and defence at the SEA Games. "We haven't really seen most of the teams we'll be playing against. Singapore is the only one we know. Everything else will be new — different styles, different systems, different pace."

A whole different continent, too.

THE LONG WAY TO ELIGIBILITY

Pagdato's road to wearing a Philippines jersey wasn't simple or quick.

Although both of her parents were born in the Philippines, IIHF eligibility rules require players to either be citizens or complete a residency period. For Pagdato, that meant a major life decision: after graduating from the University of Winnipeg in 2024 with a degree in athletic therapy, she took a remote-based job in the Philippines.

"I needed to do eight months in the country to become eligible," she explained. "So, I ended up staying almost a full year — training, playing, and just living there."

She played in two leagues: the co-ed Philippine Minor Hockey League with the Philippine Eagles, and the newly formed Women's Philippine Hockey League. In that inaugural WPHL season, she played for Team Ube — and won a championship.

"We were the first champions," she said proudly. "That was really special."

She added a silver medal in the co-ed league too. By the time she returned to Canada, she had a collection of medals, a passport, IIHF eligibility — and a spot on the national team.

FROM THE OLYMPICS TO SOUTH WINNIPEG

Like many Canadian hockey stories, Pagdato's begins in a community rink. Unlike many, it also begins with figure skates.

Her father Larry wasn't a hockey player — more of a basketball fan — but he loved sports. He went to Jets games and took Larissa and her siblings to Moose games.

However, in 2010, Larissa watched the Vancouver Olympics.

"That was the first time I really saw women's hockey," she said. "Seeing them win gold — that was huge for me. I knew I wanted to do that."

Her dad put her and her sister Hanna into figure skating first to learn how to skate. But Larissa wanted a team.

"I kept pushing," she said. "And eventually he signed us both up for hockey."

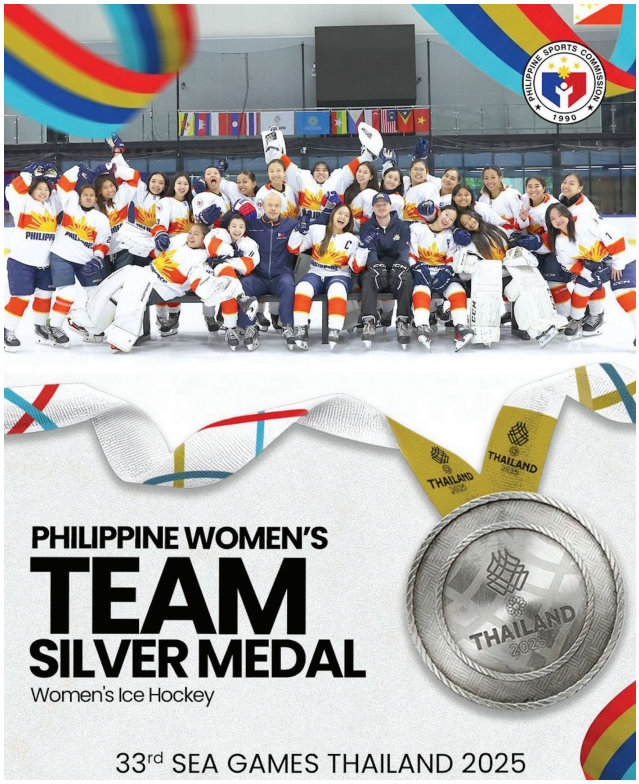
She started in South Winnipeg, playing for what was technically the Kings — though they wore Storm jerseys — and promptly went undefeated and won a city championship.

"I guess that kind of hooked me," said Larissa, a graduate of St. Mary's Academy.

She stayed in the Fort Garry and South Winnipeg system, playing for the Flyers, the Twins, and eventually the Northern Stars in the Manitoba Women's Junior Hockey League.

SISTERS, TEAMMATES, AND A FIRST CALL

In 2023, international hockey first came calling in an unexpected way.





TEAM PHILIPPINES FORWARD LARISSA PAGDATO OF WINNIPEG WITH NORTHERN STARS OF THE MWJHL



FILIPINO WOMEN'S LEAGUE CHAMPION WITH TEAM UBE

Team Philippines was putting together a roster for a tournament in the UAE and somehow got in touch with Larissa. When she mentioned her sister played goalie, the answer was immediate: bring her too.

So Larissa and Hanna, along with former RINK Hockey Academy teammate Jordy Wyant, flew to Dubai with their father for a September tournament in Al Ain.

It wasn't cheap — the trip cost about $12,000 — but Larry Pagdato didn't hesitate.

"As long as they get to pull on that jersey, I don't care what happens after that," he said at the time.

All three Manitobans made an impact. Wyant was the tournament's top scorer. All three were named players of the game and selected to the all-star contest.

For Larissa and Hanna, it was the first time they had ever played on the same team.

"We're three years apart, so it never lined up before," Larissa said. "It meant a lot for our parents to see us on the ice together."

FAMILY, HERITAGE, AND FULL CIRCLES

The SEA Games in Thailand turned into something even bigger.

Larissa's dad made the trip. So did other relatives — some flying in from the Philippines. One of her cousins from Chicago, a member of the Philippines women's national soccer team, was also competing — and won gold.

"There was a lot of family in the stands," Larissa said. "That made it really emotional."

Her parents hadn't been back to the Philippines since immigrating to Canada. Now they were in Thailand watching their daughter represent their home country in an international competition — in hockey, of all sports.

"They've made so many sacrifices for us," Larissa said. "Being able to represent our heritage like that — it means a lot."

GIVING BACK TO THE GAME

Between studies and training, Pagdato has also become a builder of the game in Winnipeg.

From 2021 to 2024, she worked with the True North Youth Foundation and St. James Minor Hockey Academy, coaching and mentoring young players. She also took part in the Filipino Hockey Jamboree last summer through the First Shift program.

"I'd love to do more of that," she said. "I was away for so long that I haven't had as many chances lately. But now that I'm back, I want to get more involved again."

Representation matters to her — especially in a sport that doesn't always reflect the diversity of the communities around it.

"Hockey gave me so much," she said. "If I can help make it more welcoming or show kids that they belong, that's important."

WHAT COMES NEXT

Right now, Pagdato is studying for the LSAT and hopes to start law school in 2026. What that means for her hockey future remains to be seen.

"It depends where I get in and what the schedule looks like," she said. "International hockey takes a lot of time."

For now, though, the focus is on the IIHF tournament in Estonia.

"It's our debut in world championship play," she said. "That's really special. We don't really know what to expect — but that's part of the fun."

From Fort Garry to Manila to Bangkok to Estonia, Larissa Pagdato's hockey journey has become something much bigger than she ever imagined — a story about family, identity, and how far the game can take you when you're willing to follow it.

"I'm just really grateful," she said. "For my parents, for the opportunities, for the chance to wear that jersey. It's something I'll never forget."



ANNIE CHIPMAN STOCKL (CENTRE IN GREY JACKET) REPRESENTS THE WINNIPEG JETS ON THE NHL'S WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

BY CHRISTINA KLYSH

Photos by Jonathan Kozub and Darcy Finley

LEADING



THE WAY

TRUE NORTH SPORTS + ENTERTAINMENT RECOGNIZES WOMEN CHANGING THE GAME FOR CELEBRATING WOMEN IN SPORT MONTH



While the NHL's March Celebrating Women in Sport campaign is a meaningful opportunity to honour women succeeding in sport, whether on the ice or off, it's equally important to reflect on the progress of equality for women in sports, and how much work is left to be done.

"We want to make sure that the month is not just about celebrating women in sport, it's also about creating opportunity," said Annie Chipman Stockl, Vice President of Marketing for True North Sports + Entertainment.

Chipman Stockl is working on initiatives to grow the game for women playing or working in sports as an advisor on the NHL's Women's Hockey Advancement Committee. Since she started working in the industry, she's seen immense progress for women in hockey, whether it's Jessica Campbell becoming the first female assistant coach in the NHL, or the creation of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), which will play the first professional women's hockey game in Winnipeg at Canada Life Centre on March 22.



"It's a great opportunity to showcase such high calibre women's hockey in our city," she said. "For young girls and boys and people who, like me, grew up not really being able to watch women's hockey on TV unless it was an Olympic year, it's just really, really cool to see."

As a former high-level hockey player herself, Chipman Stockl understands the impact that seeing Winnipeg's PWHL game live will have on young girls and women of all ages. While the creation of the PWHL is a huge step in the right direction, she notes that girls' grassroots hockey programs continue to be shut down, including programs she has been a part of.

"Those things motivate me to make sure that we're creating more opportunities because it's something that you can't take for granted," said Chipman Stockl, who helped create the Winnipeg Jets Celebrating Women in Sport Scholarship and the Manitoba Moose Celebrating Women in Sport Job Shadow Program, which marks its fifth anniversary this month.

"We came up with the idea for the job shadow program to give young women who weren't yet sure what they wanted to do with their career the chance to see just how broad their opportunities are," said Chipman Stockl. She worked with True North's Raquel Payne and Colin Peterson to launch the program during the 2021-22 season when she was the marketing manager for the Manitoba Moose.

While some roles may be obvious to young women pursuing a career in sport, behind-the-scenes jobs, like broadcast liaison Tessa Potter, aren't as well known. For over a decade, Potter has led the Winnipeg Jets home broadcasting team, which has the most women that Potter has ever worked with on a crew. As broadcast liaison she coordinates between the home and visiting broadcast teams, internal gameday production, venue operations and the NHL to ensure each team has what they need to execute a successful broadcast. Her tasks vary each gameday, from doing technical coordination to problem solving and clarifying camera positions.

"There's still a huge imbalance," said Potter. "Often, I'm still the first woman on a crew."

She has worked on broadcast engineering teams for major sporting events like the Fifa World Cup and the 2022 Beijing and 2024 Paris Olympics, for which she won two Emmy awards, and was



TESSA POTTER AT THE 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS IN MILANO CORTINA (TOP LEFT), BEIJING OLYMPICS (TOP RIGHT), WORLD CUP IN QATAR (BOTTOM LEFT) AND AT WORK WITH THE WINNIPEG JETS (BOTTOM RIGHT)

the first woman NBC hired to work as a tech for an Olympic ceremony. At the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics, Potter covered events at the Livigno Snow Park for NBC.

"It's really hard when you're the first of anything," said Potter. As the first female president of the Western Association of Broadcast Engineers (WABE), she strived toward making the industry more inclusive, especially when it came to the language WABE used.

"If we don't all see ourselves in the language we use, we need to update it to make organizations poised toward a future where anybody can be a part of it," said Potter.

She was glad to see progress from the Olympics with a recent mandate that women make up a certain percentage of a broadcasting crew.

"People are really acknowledging that if they do not actively invite people, they won't see them in those spaces," said Potter.

Sara Orlesky, Sr. Producer and Host for the Winnipeg Jets, has also witnessed the increase of women working in front of and behind the camera since she entered the sports broadcasting industry in the early 2000s. Before the return of the Jets brought her back to Winnipeg where her coverage focused on the city's hometown teams, Orlesky started her career in Vancouver with Citytv and The Score and then moved to Toronto to cover the CFL, Toronto sports teams and major national and international sporting events for TSN.

"It's improved a lot, and not just on air," said Orlesky. "You now see a number of women behind the scenes, whether it's as camera operators or managerial roles, women are putting their stamp all over sports organizations."

While Orlesky has often been the only woman in the room, she doesn't want that to define her.

"I don't want to be known as the female broadcaster, I'm just a broadcaster. I think we do a disservice when we start attaching labels to it," said Orlesky. "From the very start, I think people could tell how serious I was about my work, and because of that I think people have treated me with a lot of respect."

Chipman Stockl has faced similar situations of being the lone woman in a group, but she also prefers to focus on what she brings to the table.

"It's not something that I've ever really been too concerned about. My main concern is just making sure that I know what I'm talking about and that I'm informed and prepared," she said.

Those are also some of the qualities Chipman Stockl looks for when hiring for True North's marketing team.

"The best candidate for any position we hire is someone who's very capable in what their role is," said Chipman Stockl. "I would focus first on just becoming the best at the skill and area that you want to work in and then find your way into sport from there."

Potter doesn't want young women to be discouraged from pursuing a career in an industry that is currently male dominated. She says there's a strong community of women working behind the scenes of broadcasting that's very supportive of one another, and thanks to the increase in need for content for social media, the broadcasting space needs women in tech more than ever.

"If you're interested, come on in. There's never been a better time as far as opportunity for growth," said Potter.

When Orlesky reflects on the beginning of her career, her ability to push herself out of her comfort zone is what stands out, and what she encourages young women who are pursuing a career in sports to also do.

"Keep going for it," said Orlesky. "Read as much as you can, find different writers and styles of reporting that you like, and try to reach out and ask questions of people when the opportunity is there. You'd be surprised how many people are willing to answer."

Chipman Stockl, Potter and Orlesky are just a few of the 100-plus women who are part of the True North Sports + Entertainment team and who will be honoured at the Winnipeg Jets' annual Celebrating Women in Sport game on March 5, along with others making an impact in sport. Get your tickets now at winnipegjets.com/tickets.



ANNIE CHIPMAN STOCKL (BOTTOM LEFT) WITH PARTICIPANTS IN THE MOOSE JOB SHADOW PROGRAM IN THE PRESS BOX AT CANADA LIFE CENTRE



At hockey for all centre's Focus Fitness, manager and head coach AJ Zeglen has worked with many high-level female athletes over the years, helping them reach their fitness goals and excel in their respective sports.

In celebration of March's International Women's Day and Month, Zeglen caught up with an athlete who has stood out for her leadership qualities and work ethic: Dr. Stephanie Grossi.

From Winnipeg, Grossi is a former Manitoba U18 captain and Syracuse University women's hockey alumna who is now a family medicine physician and fellow of the University of Alberta Sports Medicine program. She plans to return to Winnipeg as a sports medicine doctor.

She shared her perspectives on sport and wellness, and some personal philosophies that have kept her focused along her journey.



DR. STEPHANIE GROSSI DURING HER DAYS AS CAPTAIN OF THE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ORANGE WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

Q&A WITH DR. STEPHANIE GROSSI

Dr. Stephanie Grossi is a former Manitoba Ul8 captain and Syracuse Universrty alumna noW specializing in sports medicine, and she caught up with conditioning coach AJ Zeglen to discuss fitness, sports, and wellness.

Photo courtesy of the University of Syracuse

Q: What first got you in the gym?

A. Summer training for hockey.

Q: Who are some people you look up to?

A. My parents, my fiancé, my grandparents, my brother and my team physician in Syracuse.

Q: What is your favourite thing to train?

A. Ideally on ice training. In the gym, I enjoy cardio and leg days.

Q: What is the gym to you?

A. The gym is a safe space, a place to process the day, to do hard things and push myself and be surrounded by likeminded people.

Q: Why is staying in shape important to you?

A. It's a passion of mine, a huge part of my life and those closest to me share my passion. It helps me rejuvenate and ground myself to perform and feel my best in my job and personal life. It is also a key component of sports medicine. Our job is helping people live active healthy lifestyles. I want to be a good example for my patients.

Q: What is the best advice you've ever received?

A. "If you don't believe in yourself, how can you expect others to believe in you" - Mark Trumbo. Throughout sports or medical training, the first step in succeeding is believing you belong in the room and can add value and contribute.

Q: What is the best advice you can give?

A. Identify your core values and use these to guide your life. Decisions become easier when you know what you stand for, who you stand for and what kind of person you want to be.

Q: What is your biggest regret?

A. Not getting into a college hockey brawl during my hockey career.

Q: What is something you've learned?

A. Not to sweat the small stuff. If you stay consistent, are a good person and are reliable, things will work out. Good things take time.

Q: What are you most proud of?

A. Being someone my family can rely on.

Q: What is the key to success?

A. To surround yourself with good people, people who are harder working, more selfless, kinder, smarter, faster and tougher than you. It will make you better.

Q: How has music helped you?

A. Music is a motivator and helps me clean the house and lift more in the gym.

Q: Which actor would play you in a movie?

A. Sandra Bullock.

Q: What is your favourite book?

A. *Educated* by Tara Westover shows how far determination and grit can get you regardless of your circumstances and made me thankful for the educational opportunities I have been given. My grandmother was not permitted to continue school beyond Grade 8 because "women didn't need an education." From a young age, my family instilled in me the importance of being educated whether that be through self-education through books and the news, learning through life experiences or formal educational pathways. Be open to lifelong learning. Be curious. Knowledge is power.

Q: What are your thoughts on the human race?

A. It has accomplished so much in such a short time and is capable of so much more if we work together and everyone has a drive to contribute in big or small ways.

Q: What is the greatest lesson you have learned so far?

A. Outcomes are not guaranteed; the only thing you can control is your effort and attitude. You may not get the outcome you were hoping for but the relationships you build and effort you put in does not go unnoticed – by yourself or by others who put in a similar effort. Those relationships will open new doors and last a lifetime (advice from a mentor, AJ Zeglen).

Q: What is your motto for life?

A. Life is full of opportunities to make it what you want. Live with intent, purpose and passion.

Q: What is one core belief you hold?

A. Our bodies are meant to move; we need movement for mental, physical and social well-being. Much of the increase in disease today is due to a lack of moving our bodies. It is never too late to start exercising or playing sport. Whether young or old, activity can positively change your life.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GROWING GIRLS' HOCKEY

BY CHRISTINA KLYSH
Photos by Jonathan Kozub

HOCKEY FOR ALL CENTRE EXPANDS FEMALE-FOCUSED PROGRAMMING

Girls' hockey is growing at an incredible rate and it's not a coincidence.

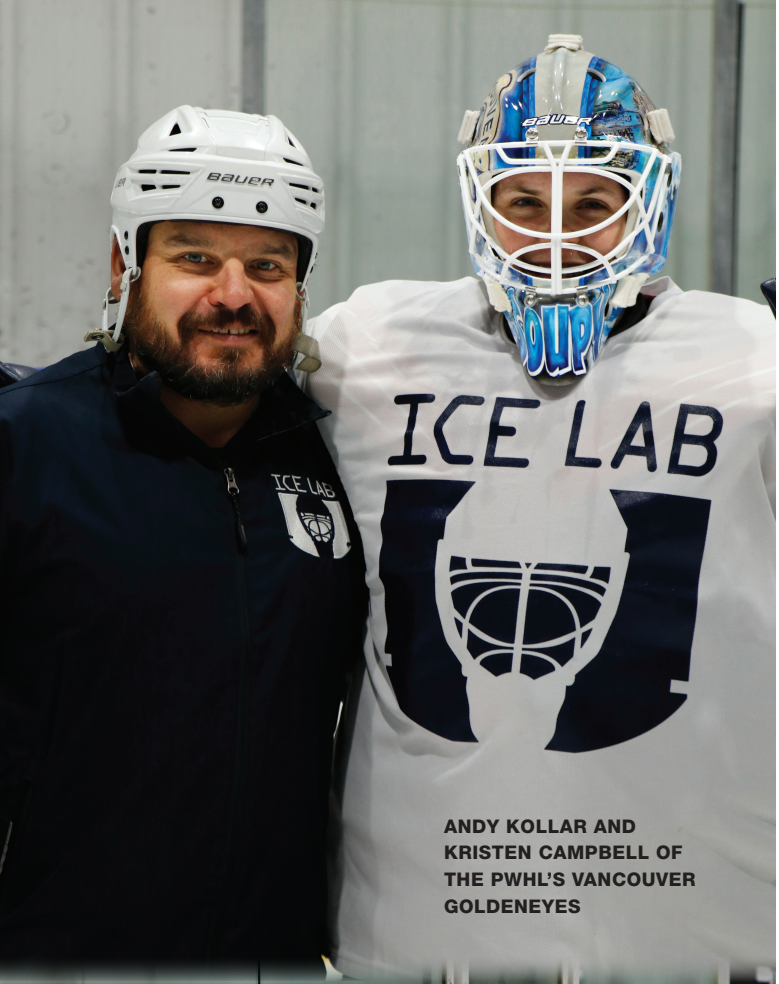
"The only area of hockey that's growing in terms of new registrations is female," said David Sattler, general manager of hockey for all centre. "We're seeing an explosion of girls hockey and interest."

While there could be several reasons for the rise in demand, one likely points to the increase of opportunity for female hockey players in North America, especially with the creation of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL). Pro women's hockey and its players are now more visible to young girls, allowing them to have a wider range of role models to look up to and more opportunities to succeed in the sport past university.

"While there were always opportunities for females to play at a high level, until a few years ago, there was never a professional opportunity," said Sattler. "You had to be one of the top 23 players in the country to make the national team."

In recent years, hockey for all centre has increased its female-focused programming for all levels to address the demand. This spring, Jets Hockey Development at hockey for all centre is offering programs for U11, U13, U15 and U18 female skill development, with each age group focusing on progression and skills that are important to develop at each level.

"The girls consistently show up with so much energy and a real desire to learn. They're receptive to feedback and genuinely want to improve their game," said Morgan Wabick, coach at hockey for all centre. "The most rewarding part of coaching young female hockey players is watching them develop and build confidence. It's special to see girls trying new things and making mistakes in an environment where they feel comfortable and supported."



ANDY KOLLAR AND KRISTEN CAMPBELL OF THE PWHL'S VANCOUVER GOLDENEYES



MORGAN WABICK

Morgan and her sister Taylor played for the University of Connecticut for five years and both went on to play professional hockey in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden. They are just a few of the talented female coaches who coach the female-focused programs at hockey for all centre.

"Having female coaches for young female hockey players is important because it provides role models who understand the unique challenges and experiences girls may face in sports," said Taylor. "Female coaches can offer perspective, guidance, and mentorship that helps players build confidence both on and off the ice."

This spring, the new Jets Hockey Development program pathway for female hockey players will start at U11, where players will work on individual skill refinement of skating, puck handling, passing and shooting while starting integrated off-ice training. Moving up to U13, players will focus on gaining speed and decision-making under pressure to prepare them for competitive play. Once players reach U15, they will be preparing to make the jump to the next level, whether it be high school, AAA, U18, in university or beyond. These high intensity development sessions will focus on complex movements and game-like drills, with off-ice training teaching athletes how to optimize performance and reduce injury risk. Finally, the U18 level helps players prepare for high-performance hockey, with focus on high-speed, quick release, puck control and protection, agility and acceleration.

"The most important part of skill development is that it encourages creativity and lets players learn from their mistakes without feeling discouraged," said Taylor.

hockey for all centre also offers goaltender training at the ESSO Ice Lab, with goalies from the PWHL and women's national team training there regularly, and a girls-only First Shift program. First Shift breaks down barriers for families new to the sport by making hockey affordable, manageable and fun with the spring program for girls already sold out.

Sattler points out that the female programming hockey for all centre offers now reflects what has been available to male hockey players for years.

"When you look at the growth of female hockey, the question is why haven't we been offering these programs?" said Sattler. "Sometimes you have to do the old adage of 'build it and they'll come' and create a path so they can see themselves in it."

As well as expanding their programming, hockey for all centre recently hosted its first girls' hockey tournament and will host Scotiabank Girls Hockey Fest in mid-March, with around 400 young female hockey players coming to the facility to grow their skills on and off the ice.

Registration for spring programming is now open. For more on female-focused programming at hockey for all centre and to register, visit hockeyforallcentre.com.

JHD

JETS HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT

SPRING 2026

PROGRAMS ARE NOW OPEN





hockey for all centre

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BY FRANKIE BENVENUTI
Photos by Jonathan Kozub

IN THE COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY IS EVERYTHING FOR THE MANITOBA MOOSE



TRUE NORTH'S RAQUEL PAYNE (FAR LEFT) AND CASSIDY MCGOWAN (FAR RIGHT) WITH THE 2025 MANITOBA MOOSE JOB SHADOW PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.

Community Relations Coordinator Cassidy McGowan is the behind-the-scenes expert for the Manitoba Moose, creating, planning, and executing community initiatives. If it involves working with external organizations, collecting applications, fundraising, or player appearances, it lands on her desk.

McGowan has always had a passion for sport, playing ringette in her youth, but she says a career in professional hockey is something she found "accidentally."

"I didn't know that this type of job even existed when I went to school," she explained. "I have a Bachelor's of Kinesiology and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. I initially went into school to do physiotherapy, realized it wasn't for me, but I still liked both of those programs. So, I decided to see it through and figure it out."



JOB SHADOW PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS GET THE CHANCE TO GO BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE PRESS BOX ON A MOOSE GAME DAY.

Figure it out, she did. After graduating, McGowan worked in COVID clinics, but the love of sports continued to call her name. She coached and instructed ringette on the side, serving on the board of directors as the director of player development with the North Winnipeg Ringette Association. In 2021, McGowan became a Program Coordinator with the True North Youth Foundation at Camp Manitou before moving to her current role.

"Community relations was one job I felt passionate about. It was the only position I really thought could pull me away from the foundation. It's about being a part of something bigger than just yourself, and that was always important to me. I want a fulfilling job. I want something that's going to fill my cup at the end of the day. I find that this is the best of both worlds."

There's a lot more to a Moose community event than just showing up on the day, signing a few autographs, and making a donation. It requires organization-wide communication, which McGowan coordinates.

"There are a lot of different internal departments that are coordinating, such as graphics, marketing, and hockey operations," she explained. "We might be dealing with the external organizations that we're partnering with. A large part of my job is communicating and organizing between all those factors. Then when everything starts to come together, it's telling the players you arrive here at this point."

For all the work that goes into making a visit happen, McGowan knows it all pays off when the day finally arrives.

"Whether it's foster family meet and greets, Stick to Reading, or Backyard Rink, you just see these kids light up," she said. "They get to meet and talk to their local heroes. It's very rewarding to see their joy and their interactions, because you can tell it does matter."

Within the organization, Moose community events aren't treated as an obligation. They are an opportunity to engage with the next generation of fans, players, and most importantly, leaders. Appearances are a chance for players to make personal connections with the people cheering them on throughout the season.

The staff and players look forward to those days and show plenty of enthusiasm each time they arrive at an event.

"We jump at the chance to get into the community when we can, because we find that it is also fulfilling and rewarding," McGowan said. "We have so many players on this team who want to do more and want to be involved. When we have requests for player appearances they raise their hand, saying, 'yeah, I hope to be involved in that.'"

Action on the ice may be limited to the season, but community initiatives happen year-round.

"This is something that goes all year long," McGowan said. "It's not something that ends when the season ends. We still get to do appearances throughout the summer. We still get to visit organizations. It's not just during the hockey season, and I think that's important."

Given one word, McGowan chooses "pride" to describe the way her work makes her feel.

"If I can do my job well to help raise funds and raise awareness for those organizations and what they do, it makes me feel proud of my role. It makes me feel like I've accomplished something and that's important to me."



LEFT TO RIGHT: BRAD LAMBERT, CASSIDY MCGOWAN, REPRESENTATIVES FROM CAMP QUALITY MANITOBA, BRAYDEN YAGER, VILLE HEINOLA

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- JUNIOR
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- U13 AA PREP
- U15 AAA PREP





hockey for all centre

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WHERE SHE BELONGS

BY CARTER BROOKS
Photos by Jonathan Kozub and Fred Mislawchuk

Danielle Bain didn't use Disney Parks' *Fast Pass* through sports media. There was no early broadcasting degree and no straight-line path to a big-market beat. Instead, there were detours: kinesiology classes, retail shifts, a pandemic, a homicide on her first day in Thunder Bay and a three-month commute across Ontario just to stay in the game. Now, she's covering the Winnipeg Jets for TSN.

"I went to university for something completely different," Bain told *Game On*. "I did kinesiology at Wilfrid Laurier. I just knew I loved sports."

At the time, there wasn't a clear roadmap into sports media. Ryerson didn't yet have a sports-specific program, and Bain finished her degree unsure of what came next. She worked retail at Lululemon, thought things through, and listened. Then came an idea after a co-worker mentioned a sports media program in Toronto.

"I kept thinking about it for weeks," the 30-year-old said. "I talked to my parents, and they said they could really see it for me."



She enrolled in the College of Sports Media in 2019, just months before the pandemic turned the industry upside down. A third of her class dropped out. But she stayed. When the promised internship disappeared, she took advice that would shape everything that followed: don't wait, go get a job.

That job was in Thunder Bay.

"My first story was a murder," she said, still noting her shock. "Then I moved to Ottawa, and my first week there was the trucker convoy. Every first week felt chaotic."

In Ottawa, Bain worked radio news at CityNews while quietly building a sports reel on the side, covering Ottawa 67s games, local football and ultimate frisbee. She didn't love radio, but understood opportunity, and how one role could open the door to another. That mindset followed her when she spotted a Maple Leafs Sports + Entertainment posting for broadcasters and sent in her demo without overthinking it.

"I thought, this is my chance to move from news to sports," the Ontario product reflected.

She landed the Toronto Marlies' rinkside reporter role. It was part-time and low-paying, but had potential. She actually commuted from Ottawa to Toronto for three months while piecing together other freelance work, including professional basketball sideline gigs, women's para-hockey content and Olympic broadcasting work. It was demanding, but it kept her moving forward.

"It was insane," she admitted. "But people told me, 'You have to make this work.'"

Three seasons later, Bain felt something shift. She wasn't chasing the next step anymore. She was ready for it.

"I always wanted to be a beat reporter, being in the trenches. But I didn't want to go for a job I wasn't ready for."

So she started asking questions. What was TSN looking for? What matters? When the Winnipeg bureau role opened, Bain was prepared, and she reached out to someone who knew the city better than most: Sara Orlesky.

"She told me Winnipeg is a city that cares," Bain said. "They're passionate. They're engaged. That matters to me. It gives you purpose every day."

Since arriving, Bain says the biggest surprise hasn't been the job itself, but the openness that surrounds it. From fellow media members to team staff, she's found a genuine willingness to help, making the transition easier than expected. She has since married her longtime boyfriend, Duncan, and purchased a house in Winnipeg. It's safe to say that she's here for the long haul.

"From week one, I felt like I didn't have to pretend I knew everything," she said. "You don't get shamed for asking questions."

Even if those questions included local restaurant recommendations, insights on warm winter jackets and block heater extension cords.

Unlike the shock of Manitoba's -50 degree windchill, being a woman in the dressing room is nothing new for Bain. Growing up with three brothers and playing on boys' teams shaped her comfort level early. Still, she's quick to draw an important note: "Being welcomed and being trusted are different," she said. "Welcome can happen right away. Trust takes time."

Her first spark came early, in her Mississauga elementary school gym named after Cheryl Pounder. Bain remembers first realizing that there were female leagues for most sports – a moment that quietly shifted what she believed was possible.

"I didn't even know women played hockey," she laughed. "Learning about her lit that flame for me."

Now, Bain is part of a different generation, one that has been given some room to run with opportunities presented. And she's done just that. Pounder, on the other hand, also works for TSN, as an analyst. Bain finally had the chance to meet Pounder and share her origin story over dinner in Milan while covering the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Although still fresh with TSN, Bain's most significant piece of advice for young women considering a career in sports media is that of getting involved: "Talk to people. Be curious. Build connections. Ask questions."

They are words she's lived by, and ones that have brought her exactly where she belongs.

"WELCOME CAN HAPPEN RIGHT AWAY. TRUST TAKES TIME."



ANOTHER OLYMPIC MEDAL

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

When Jocelyne Larocque got the call confirming she had made Canada's Olympic women's hockey team once again, the emotions hit in familiar waves.

Relief. Pride. Gratitude.

"At first, just ecstatic," Larocque said from her home in Ottawa. "Honoured, excited — and yeah, some relief too. You don't know until you know."

At 37, the steady defender from Ste. Anne, Man., just won a silver medal at her fourth Olympic Games in Cortina, Italy, placing her in rare air in Canadian hockey history. Already the most internationally decorated Indigenous athlete in the country, Larocque continues to defy age, expectation and the sport's relentless churn.

She won Olympic gold in 2014, silver in 2018, gold again in 2022 and now silver in 2026. She has also been a mainstay at the IIHF Women's World Championship since 2011, earning four gold medals — including the most recent in 2024, when Canada edged the United States 6–5 in overtime in a classic final.

In that game, Larocque seemed to be on the ice all night, logging massive minutes and doing what she has done for more than a decade: killing plays before they become dangerous and calming the chaos.

"She just eats minutes," one coach said. And she still does. In fact, no Canadian player logged more icetime than Larocque in the 2026 Olympic tournament.

Still, this year's Olympic selection carried extra meaning because Larocque once stood at a crossroads. When the CWHL folded, she admitted her future in hockey felt uncertain.

"If it wasn't for the national team, I probably would have quit," she said. "That culture, those people — they kept me in the game."

Today, she's a cornerstone of the PWHL's Ottawa Charge, contributing four assists through the team's first 12 games while playing heavy minutes. But Larocque is acutely aware of how narrow the path has become at the elite level.

"With only eight teams in the PWHL, it's so hard to make a roster," she said. "There are so many great players coming out of the NCAA every year. Nobody's in a rush to retire."

That pressure applies to the national team as well. Longevity guarantees nothing.

When the Olympic call came, it was GM Gina Kingsbury, along with the entire staff, on the line.

"I was thankful she said it right away," Larocque laughed. "I didn't want to guess where the conversation was going."

Not surprisingly, what keeps her coming back isn't just the hockey. It's the room.

"The respect, the love, it's special in there," she said. "That's what pushes all of us."

At 37, Jocelyne Larocque is still here. Still steady. Still essential. And still chasing gold — not because it's familiar, but because it never gets old.



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International Women's Day

TWELVE FOR THE GAME

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of Kelly Jacobson, Hockey Manitoba, Tina Jones, Hockey Hall of Fame, Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, Darryl Gershman, PWHL, James Carey Lauder, The Brandon Sun, Alina Mytskan

Women's hockey in Manitoba isn't just growing, it's surging, driven by skill, vision, and an ever-deepening commitment at every level of the game. From grassroots rinks to elite competition, the progress is undeniable -- and it's happening fast.

Once a sport defined largely by men, hockey is increasingly being shaped, elevated, and led by exceptional women. In this province, their fingerprints are everywhere — on the ice, behind the bench, in boardrooms, and in the countless decisions that quietly strengthen the game each day.

With International Women's Day taking place on March 8, there's no better moment to shine a spotlight on those making that impact. These are the women whose shots, saves, strategies and leadership continue to push Manitoba hockey forward.

So, let's meet 12 remarkable women who are making the game better — every single day.



SARAH ZACHARIAS / NICHOLE COLLINS / AMY MARTIN / KATI TABIN

TINA JONES // WINNIPEG // ENTREPRENEUR AND EXECUTIVE



Highly-regarded Winnipeg businesswoman, Tina Jones, has never been content to follow the lines already drawn. As an executive partner in The Rink, she has helped build one of hockey's most innovative training environments, blending elite camps, ongoing skills programs, school partnerships and player development for both female and male athletes. Guided by sharp business acumen and a deep understanding of people, Jones challenges conventional thinking in pursuit of better outcomes.

"All of my life I have appreciated watching players develop and get to the next level," she said. "Being a small part of helping players develop skills and confidence they will use on the rink, and in their whole lives, is an amazing privilege."

For Tina Jones, hockey development goes far beyond the ice. It's about confidence, character and capacity — helping players reach the next level not only in sport, but in life.

NICHOLE COLLINS // PILOT MOUND // EXECUTIVE



When Nichole Collins talks about growth, she's not speaking in abstractions. As general manager of Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, she's overseeing the most ambitious expansion in the program's history—more teams, more student-athletes, and new construction rising alongside the academy's already-impressive dorms in the heart of southwestern Manitoba.

Collins' authority is earned. She first laced up skates in the Pilot Mound rink at age three, played AAA with the Westman Falcons, won provincial championships, and went on to compete with the University of Manitoba Bisons while earning Academic All-Canadian honours. Raised in a sprawling hockey family—where competition was unavoidable—she learned resilience early, often playing up and taking hits to stay in the game.

Now a parent of elite young athletes herself, Collins brings that same relentlessness to leadership. If there's a barrier, she doesn't accept it—she builds a way through.

ASHLEY VAN AGGELEN // WINNIPEG // HEAD COACH

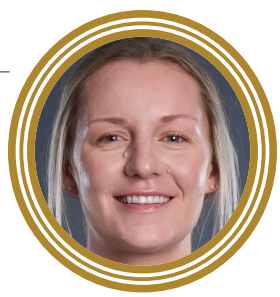


For 15 seasons, Ashley van Aggelen has been the constant behind the Winnipeg Avros—still the only head coach the Manitoba Female Hockey League U18 AAA program has ever known. Now 43, van Aggelen balances that role with coaching multiple high school teams at St. James Collegiate, a schedule that leaves little room for anything beyond the game.

Raised in St. James, van Aggelen learned early that coaching is about care as much as competition. After her U-Sport career with the U of M Bisons, Ashley immediately began building what many would now suggest, is a coaching legacy that has and will continue to leave an impact beyond her school, our province or the Winnipeg Avros. A provincial team coach six times, participant of Hockey Canada's Women's Master Coach Developer program and BFL High Performance Coach of the Year are just a few of the accolades on her resume. A legacy in motion, no doubt.

Today, the Avros stand among Manitoba's elite—a reflection of van Aggelen's belief that mentorship, resilience, and relentless commitment still matter most in hockey.

KATI TABIN // WINNIPEG // OLYMPIAN



Manitoba's second 2026 Winter Olympian, Kati Tabin was already preparing herself for bad news when she answered Hockey Canada's call. At 28, after being cut, overlooked and even walking away from the game — twice — she assumed this was another polite goodbye. Instead, the words landed like a jolt: "You're going to the Olympics."

For Tabin, the moment was almost impossible to process. A steady, physical defender from Oakbank, Man., she had followed anything but the traditional fast track. Prep hockey at Balmoral Hall and NCAA hockey at Quinnipiac. A pandemic-era exit. Marketing jobs. Visa issues. Coaching kids back home. Doubt, everywhere.

Each time she returned, she did so with more resolve and more certainty. Betting on herself with Toronto, then earning heavy minutes with the PWHL's Montreal Victoire, Tabin let her game — not hype — do the talking. She is consistent, physical and relentless and her perseverance and love for the game makes her a role model for all female hockey players across the province.

SARAH ZACHARIAS // WINNIPEG // HEAD COACH



At dawn, when the rink is still and the boards hum with cold, Sarah Zacharias is already at work—building players, programs and a future for women's hockey. As director of hockey and longtime head coach of the Balmoral Hall Blazers, Zacharias has had more than a decade behind the Blazers' bench, balancing elite leadership with motherhood and a relentless commitment to the game.

A Balmoral Hall alum, Zacharias went on to play NCAA Division I hockey at Niagara University, where she paired athletic excellence with academic distinction and early coaching experience.

Her résumé now spans national medals, Canada Games appearances, high-performance certification and selection to Hockey Canada and NHLCA female coach development programs. In 2022, she was honoured as Hockey Canada's BFL Female Coach of the Year—recognition of a career defined by preparation, mentorship and quiet impact.

AMY MARTIN // STONEWALL // ON-ICE OFFICIAL



When Amy Martin steps onto the ice, she carries more than a whistle — she brings an officiating career built on precision, persistence and quiet ambition. The 30-year-old Stonewall, Man., referee has just returned from officiating the World U18 Women's Hockey Championship, adding another milestone to a career that recently included an NHL pre-season game.

Martin's rise has been anything but linear. She began officiating while still playing minor hockey, leaned into it during high school, and steadily climbed the ranks while earning an engineering degree at the University of Manitoba and working full-time in the field. Today, she's a regular in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League and a familiar face at elite women's events, including the Women's World Championship.

This summer, her dedication was rewarded with an invitation to the NHL officiating combine in Buffalo — a rare opportunity that could signal even bigger accomplishments in the future.

KARISSA KIRKUP // PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE // COACH



Karissa Kirkup doesn't just coach hockey — she builds people. The Brandon native, recently named the national recipient of the BFL CANADA Women in Coaching Award, has carved out a reputation as one of Manitoba's most thoughtful young leaders behind the bench.

A Grade 6 teacher working toward a master's degree in education, Kirkup blends classroom lessons with on-ice leadership, emphasizing growth, resilience and connection. That approach has paid off. As head coach of the U15 AAA Brandon Wheat Kings, she guided the program from the ground up to provincial and MFHL championships, then moved on to coach at the U18 AAA level.

A former NCAA star who finished her playing career at the University of Manitoba, she also represented the province with Team Manitoba. She obviously leads from experience, balancing high standards with empathy.

Whether in the classroom or the rink, her philosophy remains the same: chase adversity, trust the process and help young athletes become their best selves.

KELLY JACOBSON // CRANBERRY-PORTAGE // EXECUTIVE AND PHOTOGRAPHER



Hockey didn't just shape Kelly Jacobson's life — it framed how she sees it. Raised in Kelvington, Sask., a small town with an outsized hockey legacy, Jacobson grew up surrounded by rinks, relatives and NHL bloodlines, where the game was less pastime than inheritance.

Her path behind the lens began close to home, documenting her son's hockey journey as it carried him across Western Canada and the North.

What started as personal storytelling soon widened, leading to junior programs like the Flin Flon Bombers and OCN Blizzard, and ultimately to published work throughout the SJHL. Along the way, Jacobson built a global community through hockey photography, capturing moments families treasure long after the final buzzer.

Today, she balances her role as Secretary-Treasurer of the KJHL – where she was recently instrumental in bringing a major corporate sponsor into the league -- with photography duties in both the KJHL and SJHL. She has a quiet but powerful presence preserving the sport's most human moments.

MEGAN GABRIELLE // VIRDEN // ADMINISTRATOR AND EXECUTIVE



In rinks across southwest Manitoba, Megan Gabrielle has long understood that the future of hockey isn't shaped only by what happens on the ice, but by who's willing to lead behind the scenes.

A longtime community volunteer and now Vice President of Hockey Manitoba, Gabrielle brings grassroots credibility to the boardroom, shaped by years spent coaching, administering teams, and running tournaments at the minor hockey level.

Professionally trained in financial services, planning, and client advocacy, she pairs hands-on hockey experience with a disciplined, results-driven approach to governance. As Chair of Hockey Manitoba's Finance Committee, Gabrielle helps guide budgeting, risk management, and long-term planning while pushing for modernized governance and stronger operational alignment.

A passionate advocate for girls' and women's hockey, she is committed to ensuring leadership pathways are open, visible, and inclusive—so the game continues to grow for everyone.

KATHY VALENTINO // THOMPSON // ADMINISTRATOR AND EXECUTIVE



Power, purpose, and puck sense define Kathy Valentino's leadership résumé—and she's bringing all three to the Hockey Manitoba boardroom.

A long-time advocate for girls' and women's hockey, Valentino arrives with deep governance credentials and a hands-on understanding of the grassroots game. She is President of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, second vice-president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and a veteran city councillor in Thompson, combining public leadership with nearly 30 years of experience in the financial sector.

Her hockey roots run just as deep. From founding the Norman U15AAA program to years of service with the Norman Northstars U18AAA, Valentino has helped shape pathways for young players—particularly in northern Manitoba. Recognized with Hockey Manitoba's Norman Volunteer Award, she now turns her focus to strengthening governance, visibility, and long-term growth for girls' and women's hockey across the province.

KRISTEN CAMPBELL // BRANDON // PROFESSIONAL PLAYER



Kristen Campbell has a knack for stopping pucks — and setbacks. The Vancouver Goldeneyes goaltender was named *Game On Magazine's* 2025 Manitoba Goaltender of the Year, a fitting honour for one of Canada's most resilient rising stars between the pipes

Her path to prominence wasn't smooth. After two standout seasons at the University of North Dakota — including WCHA Goaltender of the Year honours and a Patty Kazmaier Award finalist nod — Campbell's world was shaken when UND abruptly shut down its women's hockey program

Opportunity followed upheaval, landing her at Wisconsin, where she seized the starting role and kept climbing.

Still based in Brandon, Campbell routinely travels to Winnipeg to train, mentor young goalies and give back to the game that shaped her — all while building an international résumé that now includes stints with Team Canada and the No. 1 job with Vancouver in the PWHL. Mention the word "goaltender "among Manitoba female hockey players and Kristen Campbell is the first name that comes to mind.

CHELSEA DINNIN // LORETTE // COACH AND INFLUENCER



Chelsea Dinnin is used to turning heads with a puck on her stick — now she's doing it behind the bench. The social-media savvy hockey freestyler has joined Balmoral Hall as the Blazers' assistant coach and hockey operations coordinator, bringing skill, energy and a global following to the program.

With more than 125,000 followers across all of her social media platforms, Dinnin has partnered with the NHL, PWHL and IIHF, showcasing elite puck skills developed since her teens.

A former Blazers standout, she was a key contributor to Balmoral Hall's 2019 JWHL championship before building an impressive playing and coaching résumé. At just 24, Dinnin is back at BH with a kinesiology degree, elite hockey IQ and youthful spark — a blend head coach Sarah Zacharias believes makes her a perfect fit for the next generation of Blazers.



THE STORY NEVER DIES. THE 1920 OLYMPIC CHAMPION FALCONS WITH THEIR DESCENDANTS, TOGETHER AT CANADA LIFE CENTRE.

NEW ICELAND 150 1875 2025

THE FALCONS:

CANADA'S ICELANDIC GOLD

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by James Carey Lauder and courtesy of Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

On a cold February night in downtown Winnipeg, more than a century after they proved everyone wrong, the Winnipeg Falcons finally came home.

The crowd buzzed with modern NHL energy, but the people being honoured at Canada Life Centre played in an era before helmets, before professional contracts, before the world even had a Winter Olympics. It reached back to a group of young Icelandic Canadians who were pushed to the margins of their sport, went to war for their country, then skated onto European ice and won Canada's very first Olympic hockey gold medal – in what was then the Summer Olympics.

As the Winnipeg Jets prepared to face the Montreal Canadiens, a group of modern-day Icelandic Canadians gathered at Canada Life Centre to honour the 1920 Winnipeg Falcons — an all-Icelandic squad born from discrimination, forged by war, and crowned champions on the world's biggest stage. The night also marked 150 years of Icelandic language and culture in Manitoba, tying the Falcons' triumph to a broader immigrant story that still echoes through the province.

Before the puck dropped, New Iceland singer Sol James (Heitha Forsyth) delivered the national anthem, her voice carrying both pride and history. In the stands sat descendants of Falcons players — grandchildren and great-grandchildren of men whose names once barely appeared in hockey's official record. For them, this was personal. For the city, it was overdue.

BORN ON THE OUTSIDE

The Falcons' story begins not with glory, but exclusion.

In the early 1900s, Winnipeg's Icelandic community clustered in the city's West End — working-class neighbourhoods populated by newcomers who spoke their own language and carried unfamiliar customs. Hockey was already Canada's game, but it wasn't always Canada's unifying sport. Icelandic players found themselves shut out of Winnipeg's senior leagues, turned away not for lack of talent, but for who they were.

So, they created their own way in.

Around 1909, Icelandic teams played each other, honing their skills in relative obscurity. Two years later, in 1911, two clubs — the Vikings and the Icelandic Athletic Club — merged to form the Winnipeg Falcons, a name chosen deliberately and proudly. The falcon is, after all, Iceland's national bird.

When entry into Winnipeg's top senior league was blocked again, the Falcons found ice elsewhere, then joined a rival circuit. If the establishment wouldn't let them in, they would simply skate around it.

They got very good at doing so.

"They had to fight every inch, tooth and nail," said Cathie Eliasson, author of *Falcons Forever* and granddaughter of Falcons defenceman Konrad "Konnie" Johannesson. "Eventually, they became so good they couldn't be ignored."

But history had other plans.



FALCONS FOREVER **AUTHOR CONNIE ELIASSON, GRANDDAUGHTER OF FALCONS STAR KONNIE JONHANNESSON WEARS THE REPLICA FALCONS OLYMPIC JERSEY.**

INTERRUPTED BY WAR

When the First World War broke out, the Falcons didn't hesitate. Every player enlisted. They were proud Canadians — even if Canada's hockey establishment hadn't always treated them as such.

Two did not come home. Frank "Buster" Thorsteinson and George Cumbers were killed overseas and buried in France. Those who returned carried scars, visible and otherwise. Hockey, for a time, was secondary to survival.

Yet in the summer of 1919, the Falcons regrouped.

It wasn't a young team. It wasn't a deep one. Rosters were small in those days — six skaters, a goaltender, and precious few substitutes. But the Falcons were exceptionally fit, hardened by years of work, war, and exclusion. Old veterans blended with younger talent pulled up from the junior ranks. What they lacked in numbers, they made up for in cohesion.

They started winning. Then they started dominating.

Still denied entry to Winnipeg's senior league, the Falcons tore through the Manitoba Hockey League, beating teams in Brandon and Selkirk. When they were finally matched against the Winnipeg Hockey League champions, the result was embarrassing — for the gatekeepers. From there, the Falcons swept Fort William and stunned Toronto to capture the Allan Cup, Canada's national amateur championship.

The prize was historic: the right to represent Canada internationally.

THROWN INTO HISTORY

There was no time to celebrate.

Days after winning the Allan Cup, the Falcons were rushed onto a train, then onto a ship bound for Europe. They packed little. They trained on the deck during the Atlantic



THE 1920 ALLAN CUP PARADE HEADING DOWN MAIN STREET IN WINNIPEG

crossing. They arrived in Antwerp, Belgium, just as the 1920 Olympic Games were getting underway.

Hockey wasn't yet a Winter Olympic sport. There wouldn't be a Winter Games until 1924. But the tournament in Antwerp was very real — and very serious.

European teams quickly realized they were in trouble.

Falcons practices drew crowds. Opponents scrambled for better equipment after seeing Canada's speed and structure. One Swiss goaltender famously showed up wearing a shirt and tie. This was a different level of hockey.

When the games began, the results were ruthless.

Canada opened with a 15–0 demolition of Czechoslovakia. The semifinal against the United States was tighter — a bruising, hard-fought 2–0 win that tested the Falcons' resolve. In the final, Sweden stood no chance. Canada won 12–1 on April 26, 1920.

Gold.

Frank Fredrickson led the tournament with 12 goals. "Slim" Halderson added nine. The Falcons outscored their opponents 29–1. It wasn't luck. It was dominance.

Canada had its first Olympic hockey champion.

FORGOTTEN THEN FOUND AGAIN

And then, slowly, the story slipped away.

Because the first Winter Olympics didn't exist yet, the Falcons' gold medal was often misunderstood, dismissed, or misclassified. For decades, hockey history books glossed over Antwerp. Even Hockey Canada once failed to recognize the Falcons as the nation's first Olympic gold medallists.

That omission stung — especially in Icelandic Canadian circles, where the Falcons' story had always been passed down with pride.

Rod Palson, the key organizer behind the Jets' tribute night, remembers the moment it all clicked.

"About 14 months ago, I was sitting there thinking, 2025 is going to be 150 years since the first Icelanders settled in Manitoba," he said. "And I asked myself, what have I really done to make a statement on behalf of my heritage? The answer was... not much."

Then he thought ahead. 2026 would be an Olympic year.

"Oh," he said. "There's the story."

Grassroots advocacy — from historians, families, and the Falcons Forever committee — had already forced a correction. In 2019, Parks Canada announced that the Falcons victory would be recognized as a National Historic Moment. Their legacy found a permanent home in the Hockey Hall of Fame, the Canadian Olympic Committee Hall of Fame, and inside Winnipeg's downtown arena, where Konnie Johannesson's jersey and skates have been on display.

CANADA'S 1920 OLYMPIC GAMES ICE HOCKEY CHAMPIONS

Player	Birthdate	Hometown	Club Team
Goaltenders			
Wally Byron	09/02/1894	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Defence			
Bobby Benson	05/18/1884	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Konnie Johannesson	08/10/1896	Glenboro, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Allan Woodman	03/11/1899	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Forwards			
Frank Fredrickson	06/11/1895	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Chris Fridfinnson	12/07/1892	Baldur, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Mike Goodman	03/18/1898	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Slim Halderson	01/06/1900	Winnipeg, Man.	Winnipeg Falcons
Staff			
Coach	Gordon Sigurjonsson		
President	Herbert 'Hebby' Axford		
Secretary	William Hewitt		
Manager	Fred 'Steamer' Maxwell		
Treasurer	Bill Fridfinnson		



WINNIPEG FALCONS WIN SUPREME HONORS OF OLYMPIC HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Canadian Representatives Defeat Sweden 12-1 in Final and Bring First Olympic Championship to the Land of the Map

THE WINNIPEG FALCONS, WINNERS OF THE ALLAN CUP AND THE AMATEUR HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD

WALTER BYRON, Goal. CONNY JOHANNESSON, Defense. BOBBY BENSON, Defense. ALLAN "HUCK" WOODMAN, Center. FRANK FREDRICKSON, Center. HALDOR "HALLDORSON, Right Wing. MIKE GOODMAN, Left Wing. CHRIS FRIDFINNSSON, Left Wing.

Glad Tidings Fail to Arouse Any Undue Stir Among Local Fanatics

Introduction of Hockey as Olympic Sport Results In Decisive Victory For Winnipeg Falcons After Series of Interesting But One-Sided Engagements

Toronto Scribes Laud Falcons for Glorious Achievement Overseas

TORONTO MAYOR WIRES CONGRATS TO WINNIPEG ON VICTORY OF FALCONS

Canadian Representatives Biing Triumpit March to Final by Administtering Drubbing to Swedes—Fredrckson Gerners Six Geals—Woodnain and Fridfinnson Account for hye Each—Huck Plays Spiendid Game.

WHITEWASH HOODOO FINALLY BROKEN

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME AS SEEN BY CCRIED ASSOCIATED PRESS

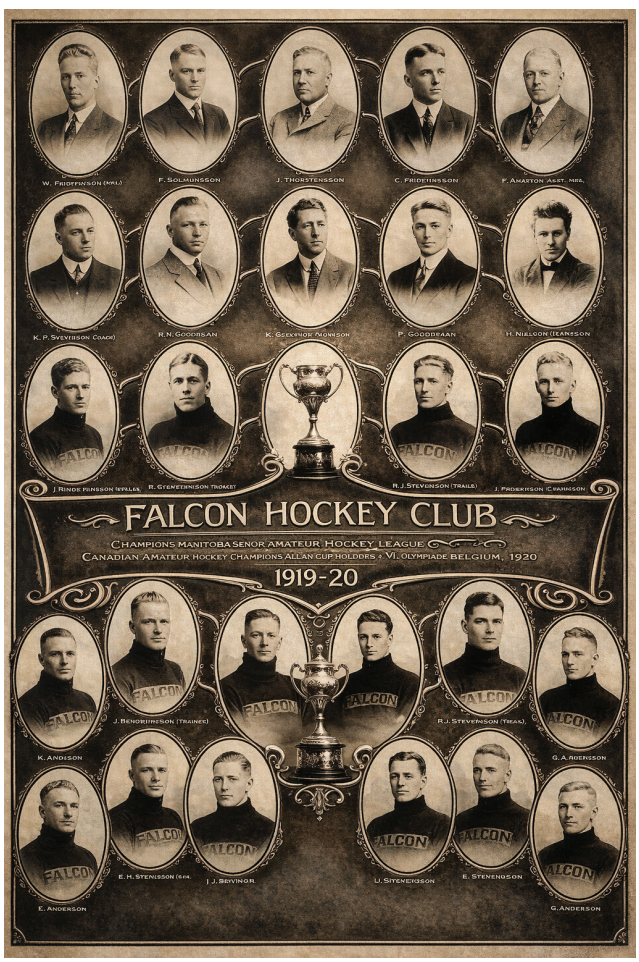
York Sporting Editors Pay Generous Tributes to the Plackey ability and Sportmanliter Qualities of Wimpjons, Crosice-Gamal Dpoention Mars, Much Prates Today—Common Line Advised to Import Flayers.

THE FRONT PAGE OF THE WINNIPEG TRIBUNE

BIG NIGHT AT THE BARN

The Jets' tribute wasn't labeled a formal "heritage night." The NHL calendar is crowded. But the organization found space around its Olympic send-off game to do something meaningful — and the response surprised even the organizers.

"With the media attention this week, it's almost unbelievable," Palson said. "It tells me the Falcons story is an incredibly interesting story. People want to know about it."



They always have. They just hadn't always been told.

For Icelandic Manitobans, the evening was about recognition. For hockey fans, it was about roots. For everyone in the building, it was a reminder that the game's greatest stories don't always begin with privilege.

When the Falcons returned home in May 1920, Winnipeg shut down. A mile-long parade rolled through the streets. A civic banquet followed. Gold watches were handed out. The team nobody wanted was suddenly the pride of the nation.

More than a century later, as the descendants of the players were honoured on the big screen above centre ice, that arc finally felt complete.

The Falcons didn't just win gold in 1920. They forced their way into Canadian hockey — and Canadian history — with skill, resilience, and an unshakable belief that excellence would speak louder than prejudice.

"It was all about perseverance," said Palson. "A trait that has been the cornerstone of Manitoba's Icelandic community since the days of the Falcons."

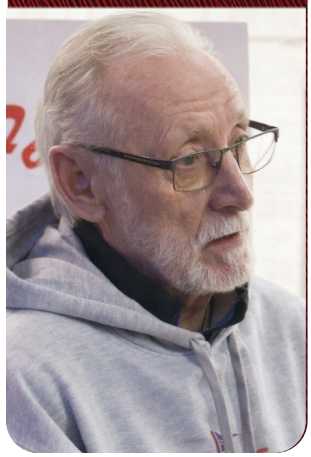
ROD PALSON

The Winnipeg Falcons/ New Iceland 150 night with the Winnipeg Jets was spearheaded by Rod Palson.

Originally from Hnausa, MB - in the heart of New Iceland - Rod is an advertising, marketing and brand expert, with countless success stories including 1979's Tuxedo Night in the NHL, the original Winnipeg Whiteout in 1987, the 1999 Pan Am Games bid presentation, Curling in Las Vegas and most recently, the New Iceland 150 logo.

The outstanding evening with the Jets on Feb. 4, was another example of Palson's innovative marketing and his heartfelt commitment to Manitoba's Icelandic community.

"On a night when the home team couldn't find a way to win, the Jets organization still proved it is elite when it comes to fans, community and appreciation for hockey history," Palson said. "We can't thank them enough".



MWJHL
MANITOBA WOMEN'S JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

PRAIRIE BLAZE

NURSING A HOCKEY PASSION

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

For high-scoring Prairie Blaze forward Kenady Christensen, hockey has never just been a game — it has been a constant thread woven through family, education and even personal balance.

It seems she's always been around the rink and when she took a year off after high school, she found that she missed the game so much, she simply had to return.

"I started when I was like two or three," said Christensen, 21, who reached the Christmas break in the Manitoba Women's Junior Hockey League fourth-place in scoring. "My older brother played hockey and I just followed him."

Growing up in a small Interlake community, Christensen's early memories revolve around rinks, road trips and chasing her brother Logan around the ice. Like many prairie hockey stories, hers began locally and then expanded outward as her skills developed.

"I'm from Lundar, so that's where I played when I was a kid," she said. "Then I played out of Lakeside and with the Interlake Lightning."

Her path eventually led her to higher levels of competition. During her U18- years, Christensen spent a season at RINK Hockey Academy, gaining exposure to elite training and faster-paced hockey before returning to Interlake for the remainder of her U18 career. At the RINK, she had 16 goals and 32 points in 24 Canadian Sport School Hockey League games.

She also played for Team Manitoba at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championship in 2022, helping Manitoba win the gold medal.



KENADY CHRISTENSEN IS HAVING A BIG YEAR FOR PRAIRIE BLAZE



CHRISTENSEN AT THE NET



CHRISTENSEN SCORES

So, it may have seemed strange to some people when Christensen stepped away from the game after finishing high school.

"Yeah, I took a year off right out of high school," she explained. "I didn't play my rookie year in the junior league because of school, but I came back because I missed it."

That return brought her to the MWJHL where she is now in her third season. It's the perfect league for her, a league she credits with allowing her to continue chasing her love for hockey while preparing for life beyond the rink.

"It's a good league," she said. "It's competitive, but it also gives you time to go to school and work. You don't play a ton of games, and you don't have to travel far, but it's still just as competitive and just as much fun as playing at an elite level like university hockey."

That balance is critical for Christensen, who is currently enrolled in the nursing program at Red River College, one of the province's most demanding post-secondary programs.

"I have two more years left," she said. "It's very challenging."

Between lectures, clinical placements and studying, hockey has become both an outlet and a source of structure.

"It gives me a break from school and everything else to get my mind off things," she said. "It's a good escape that way, for sure — even though hockey isn't exactly relaxing."

On the ice, Christensen has found a home with Prairie Blaze, a team she describes as tight-knit and driven.

"We're great," she said. "My teammates make it a lot of fun to want to come to the rink. In the dressing room, everyone's having fun and everyone gets along. And we come together well on the ice too."

That chemistry has translated into on-ice success this season, something not lost on head coach Jamie Johnson.

"She's a great player and a very hard worker," Johnson said. "She loves to be out on the ice, and she's got really great drive."

Johnson describes Christensen as a dependable two-way forward — a player who contributes in all zones and understands the flow of the game.

"Kenady sees the ice really well," Johnson said. "She's patient, she takes her time, and she's a strong goal scorer for us."

Equally important is what Christensen brings off the ice.

"She's positive," Johnson added. "She loves to win and she works hard, and you can see that in her communication with her teammates."

That mindset was shaped early, in part by watching her older brother Logan, who went on to play four Western Hockey League seasons with Saskatoon and Medicine Hat and today plays senior hockey with the Morden Bombers of the South East Manitoba Hockey League.

"He did lots with his hockey career," Kenady said. "He was definitely a good mentor — someone to practice with and to learn from."

Hockey remains a family affair. Her two younger siblings, Jackson and Brooklyn, are following a similar path, both playing hockey with Interlake.

Interestingly, when she's not at the rink or buried in textbooks, Christensen prefers quieter pursuits.

"I like to hang out with my family," she said. "My younger siblings are still kids, so I spend time with them. I also like to read and do puzzles."

As the MWJHL season moves toward the stretch drive, the Prairie Blaze are positioning themselves as a playoff contender, bolstered by a strong corps of returning players.

"We're having some good success this year," Johnson said. "We're hoping to be around late in the playoffs. We expect Kenady to be a big part of that."

MANITOBA WOMEN'S

JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

MWJHL

MANITOBA WOMEN'S JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



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1,500

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by James Carey Lauder

AFTER 1,500 GAMES BEHIND A BENCH AND MORE THAN 750 WINS, NEEPAWA TITANS' HEAD COACH AND GM KEN PEARSON IS STILL BUILDING SOMETHING IN HIS HOMETOWN.

The numbers flashed on the scoreboard, the handshakes came, and the moment passed the way Ken Pearson would have wanted it to — without much fuss.

1,500 games. More than 750 wins.

For nearly three decades, Pearson has been a constant behind a Manitoba Junior Hockey League bench, quietly piling up victories while doing something he considers far more important: building young men, not just hockey teams.

"I guess this means I've been around a long time," Pearson said with a laugh. "But we're here to develop kids and move them on to the next level. That's what this is really about."

Still, 1,500 games coached in the CJHL is a rare kind of longevity in a profession known for turnover. Pearson, now 52, is one of the longest-serving coaches in the MJHL, and one of the few to spend so much of his career in one place.

His coaching journey started almost by accident.

Pearson was injured in January of his 20-year-old playing season in Neepawa. His head coach at the time, now Victoria Royals (WHL) assistant Don McGillivray — who also worked as a Nestlé sales representative at the time — had to leave town for meetings in Calgary. With games to play and a roster to manage, Pearson found himself behind the bench.

"I went on the bench and just started coaching," he recalls. "At the end of the season, Don asked me to join him as an assistant."

That small detour changed everything.

After two seasons as an assistant, Pearson moved to Winkler, then briefly reunited with McGillivray in Prince Albert before returning to Winkler to take over as head coach and general manager for the 1998–99 season. He held those jobs with Winkler and the Blues before Neepawa came calling again in 2019.

When Pearson arrived, the franchise was in transition, both on and off the ice. He has now been part of the organization for seven seasons, through a full rebrand and a long rebuilding process.

"It was a troubled situation," he says. "I'm proud of what we've built here. We've still got work to do, but we're becoming a place where kids want to come play because of how we run things."

That reputation — more than any banner or record — is what Pearson values most.



KEN PEARSON'S OLD NEEPAWA NATIVES HOCKEY CARD

Every season, he estimates, between five and eight players move on from his program, whether to college hockey, major junior, or simply the next chapter of their lives.

"I was told a long time ago that winners breed winners," he says. "You want to build a winning program, develop players, and move them on. That's the goal."

Long before he was guiding others, Pearson was one of those kids chasing the game.

He first put on skates at five years old in Carberry, where his father worked as a plant manager. After his parents divorced, his mother — raising three boys — moved the family back to Neepawa. Pearson played minor hockey there from the age of six through U15.

He later had a brief stint with the AAA Yellowhead Chiefs, but financial realities brought him back home. Carberry had a Junior B team at the time, so Pearson lived in Neepawa and played there, while also practicing with Neepawa's Jr A team when it launched in 1989.

By 17, he was a full-time junior player in Neepawa, where he played until he was 20 — the same place where his coaching career would begin.

Now, with 1,500 games behind him and another season moving forward, Pearson remains stubbornly uninterested in personal milestones.

Ask him about the number, and he talks about players. Ask him about the years, and he talks about the program. Ask him about success, and he talks about what comes next for the kids in his room. He's the type of coach that makes junior hockey great.



NEEPAWA TITANS HEAD COACH KEN PEARSON

FUTURE GREATNESS

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

HALEY CHIPELSKI IS A RARITY. A 14-YEAR-OLD GRADE 9 STUDENT WHO LIVES ON A FARM BETWEEN FOXWARREN AND ST. LAZARE IS SLOWLY BUT SURELY TURNING INTO ONE OF THE TOP PLAYERS IN THE MANITOBA FEMALE HOCKEY LEAGUE U18 AAA. IT'S A TESTAMENT TO A PASSION FOR THE GAME AND THE LURE OF THE BACKYARD RINK.

At 14-years-old, Haley Chipelski already looks comfortable in a place few players her age ever reach — the Manitoba Female Hockey League's U18 AAA level.

In fact, in Week 7 of this, her rookie season, Chipelski was named the MFHL's Defender of the Month, scoring two goals and adding two assists as she helped her Yellowhead Chiefs earn four of six points.

In fact, she's third in scoring among the league's defenders and the top scorer on her team, with seven goals and 15 points in 19 games. It takes a lot of confidence to play defence and jump into the rush, when you happen to be 14 years old playing in a league with 17-and 18-year-olds.

No doubt, that confidence didn't come overnight.

Chipelski was skating by the time most kids are learning to walk, carving turns on a backyard rink at just two years old. By three, she was playing hockey with her older brother -- Waywayseecappo Wolverines defenceman Adam Chipelski -- chasing pucks and, quietly, chasing something else too.

"I wanted to be like him," she said with a grin.

Growing up near Foxwarren, Chipelski followed a familiar prairie hockey path. She began in boys' hockey, in the early years on the blue line with her older brother, later defending in front of her younger brother, a goalie.

For her U11 and U13 seasons she played on both a boys' team and a girls' team. From there, she made the jump to U15 AAA before earning a spot with the Yellowhead Chiefs at just 14 — an age when most players are still trying to figure out where they fit.

Trying out for a U18 AAA team at that age takes more than talent. It takes belief and a high level of confidence in one's own skill.



14-YEAR-OLD STAR HALEY CHIPELSKI OF THE YELLOWHEAD CHIEFS



"I wanted to do better than my older brother," Chipelski said. "So that pushed me."

That push has carried her a long way. Chiefs' head coach Logan McGonigal says Chipelski's ability stands out immediately — but it's her poise that truly separates her.

"The way she sees the ice, it's unbelievable," McGonigal said. "She's an offensive-minded type of player who makes the right plays 99 per cent of the time."

Playing against older competition is one thing. Doing it calmly, shift after shift, is another.

"Playing in this U18 league as a 14-year-old and having the ability to be as composed and make those plays is pretty special," McGonigal said. "It's been a long time since, in my opinion, we've seen a player at this age of that caliber."

Chipelski shrugs off the praise, preferring to talk about what she loves most about the game.

"Stickhandling," she said simply. "I just love hockey."

Hockey is, without question, her top priority. She practices twice a week, usually plays two games on the weekend, and finds extra ice time whenever she can. If she can't get to the rink, she's shooting pucks in the barn loft at home.

"I try to be on the ice every day," she said.

That work ethic is rooted in farm life. Chipelski grew up on a large family farm — about 3,000 acres — near Prairie View, nestled between Foxwarren and St. Lazare. The nearest town has a population of about 300.

Out there, everyone helps out.

"We all help," she said. "That's just how it is."

The farm has shaped her game more than she might realize. Long days, responsibility, and self-motivation translate well to hockey, especially at a level where nothing is given.



McGonigal has known Chipelski for years, having coached her in spring hockey before she joined the Chiefs. That familiarity made her transition easier — but it didn't guarantee anything.

"She's very coachable, always wanting to learn, always willing to listen," he said. "Just a super, super coachable kid."

Just as important, she fits seamlessly into the dressing room.

"She's a very, very good teammate," McGonigal said. "She's super humble — to a fault. She doesn't make it about herself."

Chipelski is still in Grade 9, balancing school with a demanding hockey schedule. Asked how she manages it all, she keeps the answer simple.

"I see my friends," she said. "I just try my best."

She also plays other sports, another indicator of her athletic foundation, but hockey remains the focus. Asked about the future, her eyes light up.

"Play D-1 and then in the PWHL," she said. "That would be great if that happened."

It's a big dream — but not an unrealistic one.

The Chiefs are a strong team with legitimate ambitions, and Chipelski believes in what they can do together.

"We've got really good team spirit," she said. "If we played a full 60-minute game, we'd be pretty close to beating anyone in the league."

For McGonigal, the most exciting part isn't what Chipelski is doing now — it's what comes next.

Despite her age, she's already holding her own against older, stronger, more experienced players. She processes the game quickly, makes smart decisions under pressure, and carries herself with maturity beyond her years.

Those traits can't be taught. They're built on backyard rinks, in barn lofts, on long prairie roads between small towns, and in the quiet determination of a young player who simply loves the game.

Future greatness isn't guaranteed. But for Haley Chipelski, it's clearly within reach.

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COMMITTED TO THE CRJHL

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by James Carey Lauder, Rayme Thomson, Cassidy Dankochik and courtesy of members of the CRJHL



SELKIRK HEAD COACH AND GM CHRIS POPONICK (CENTRE) WITH ST. MALO HEAD COACH AND GM RALPH COLLETTE (RIGHT) WITH CRJHL PAST PRESIDENT AND CURRENT BOARD MEMBER RICK OLSON (LEFT).

On most nights in the Capital Region Junior Hockey League, if you look down a bench long enough, you'll notice something impressive: the people running the team are often the same people who once wore the jersey.

In Selkirk, St. Malo, North Winnipeg, Lundar, Arborg, La Broquerie and Beausejour, the league's past is very much its present. Former players are now general managers, head coaches and assistants. Some played in the CRJHL. Some played in its predecessor leagues. Some played against each other, or for each other. And now, on winter nights across southern Manitoba, they stand behind the boards, clipboards in hand, still involved in a league that never quite let them go.

"You're not going to find another league like it," said Selkirk Fishermen GM Chris Poponick, who played in the old Manitoba Junior B days and has been part of the Fishermen organization for more than four decades. "It proves the value of the product. Guys enjoyed their time playing, and now they want to return to the league and give back."

Poponick laughs when he points out that his entire coaching staff is made up of former Junior B or CRJHL players.

"Yeah, we've all got that Fishermen logo tattooed on our butt somewhere," he joked. "But it says a lot about the quality of the league and the people involved."

In Selkirk, the continuity runs deep. Head coach Tyndall Fontaine was one of the league's best players in his day. Assistant Jason Vitt and Josh Poponick are former Fishermen captains. Chris Poponick himself played in the 1980s, losing in the finals in 1987 — a heartbreak he still hears about.

"Rod Gluck used to pin that on me every time we met at league meetings," Poponick said. "Our coach put something in the paper about being up 3-0 and getting ready for Westerns, and then we lost four-straight."

That lingering sting, he says, is part of what keeps people connected.

"That's the heart of the Fishermen," Poponick said. "The people still involved want to make it successful."

For Poponick, the league isn't just a passion — it's a family affair. His daughter is the team trainer. His wife helps with 50-50s. Son Josh, a former Fishermen captain, is now an assistant coach, and Josh's girlfriend handles social media.

"That's what this league is in a lot of places," Poponick said. "It's family."

A NATURAL TRANSITION

In Arborg, Jack Einarson's path from player to coach was nearly seamless.

"Coaching wasn't a difficult transition," said Einarson. "I had relationships with people on the board, and right after I finished playing, I joined as an assistant."

This season marks his first year as head coach of the Ice Dawgs, with assistant Tyson Barylski — a four-year Arborg veteran and last season's captain — beside him.

"Often, I'll look across the ice and see guys I played with or against," Einarson said. "It says a lot about the league. It lets players work or go to school and still play competitive hockey. People enjoy their time here, and when they get a chance to coach, many want to come back."

That balance between competitive hockey and real life is a recurring theme.

In St. Malo, head coach Ralph Collette has watched that cycle repeat itself for years.

"What does it say about the league when guys come back to coach?" Collette said. "It's what we promote — giving back. That's how I was brought up. Coaches encouraged me to stay in the game."

But Collette also understands how fragile that pipeline can be.

"It's a big commitment," he said. "A lot of guys want to coach, but then life happens — marriage, kids, work. Timing matters."

One thing that helps, he believes, is the CRJHL schedule.

"With about 30 games and less travel, it's easier for coaches to commit," Collette said. "That's huge."

St. Malo's bench reflects that cycle. Thomas Maynard and Mike Lafreniere both played in the league. Maynard, just 23, already has championships as both a player and a coach.

"He's a local kid who loves St. Malo and wants to give back," Collette said. "And he's very good at it."

North Winnipeg Satellites head coach Murray Monkman, who played in the old Manitoba Junior B Hockey League, sees former players returning as a necessity.

"It's hard to find coaches, especially in the Interlake," Monkman said. "Having guys like Jack Einarson in Arborg and Tyler Medeiros in Lundar come back is extremely important for hockey in their communities and the region."

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

In La Broquerie, the philosophy runs even deeper.

GM and governor, Steve Hildebrand said local connection wasn't just a bonus when hiring a coaching staff — it was essential.

"We wanted someone who understood our history and the passion in our town," Hildebrand said.

The result was a coaching group with deep community roots. Dan Talliefer, Rejean Carriere and Jason Moquin all have strong ties to La Broquerie. Two played major junior. One played junior and senior at home. They are also cousins.

"There's deep hockey history in that family," Hildebrand said. "They're proud of being from La Broquerie, and that's why we wanted them as the face of our team."

But Hildebrand stresses this wasn't about hiring locals for the sake of it.

FROM PLAYERS TO COACHES



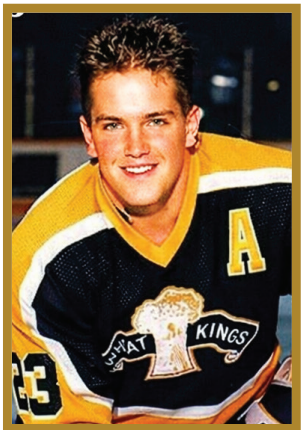
St. Malo assistant coach Thomas Maynard



Selkirk Fishermen assistant coach Josh Poponick as a player with Selkirk



Arborg Ice Dawgs head coach Jack Einarson as a player with Arborg



Beausejour Comets Head Coach Troy Kennedy back in the day with the Brandon Wheat Kings



Selkirk Fishermen assistant coach Owen Derewianchuk as a player with Selkirk



Lundar Coach Tyler Medeiros



North Winnipeg Satelites head coach Murray Monkman and GM Don Gibson



Selkirk Fishermen assistant coach Tyndal Fontaine, as a Selkirk player with the Carillon Cup



The LaBroquerie Habs coaching staff (from left) Dan Taillefer, Rejean Carriere and Jean Moquin

"You hire a coach first," he said. "We wanted young guys with experience who wanted to break into coaching. If we could give them that opportunity in their hometown, even better."

In Lundar, Tyler Medeiros understands how hard it can be to walk away — because he tried.

"I played for a few teams in the league and loved it," he said. "I missed it when it was done."

His former coach, Brad Drews, asked him to join the staff immediately, but Medeiros declined. His brother was still playing.

"I didn't think that dynamic was right," he said. "My brother was good enough on his own."

Instead, Medeiros finished school, took coaching courses at the University of Manitoba, and waited. When the timing was right, the decision was easy.

"The league gave me an opportunity," he said. "Giving something back to Lundar was a no-brainer."

Now, familiar faces are everywhere.

"I played against Donnie in North Winnipeg. Against Tyndall in Selkirk. I was traded for Mike Lafreniere in St. Malo," he said, laughing. "We joke that we were traded for each other in 2013 and we're both still with those teams."

The hierarchy comes full circle, too.

"Ralph Collette coached me for two years in St. Malo," Medeiros said. "Brad, who was our head coach when I was an assistant, is now our GM. It's a close-knit league."

BUILDING AT HOME

Not every CRJHL coach played in the league, but many share the same community-first mindset.

In Beausejour, Troy Kennedy arrived with experience at the junior, professional and AAA levels. When the Comets joined the league, coaching close to home made sense.

"I was coaching in the city and travelling a lot," said Kennedy, who is also a scout with the WHL's Swift Current Broncos. "This gave me more time for family and scouting."

What surprised him was how quickly the program grew.

"Our first year, the crowd was incredible," Kennedy said. "We were filling the rink. Kids want to play in front of that."

Relationships did the rest.

"If you treat players right, they want to come back," he said. "They want to play for you."

So why does the CRJHL pull people back?

Part of it is geography. Part of it is schedule. Part of it is community.

Mostly, it's because the league has always been about more than hockey.

"It's a good news story," Poponick said. "It proves guys enjoyed their time here. They missed it. And they want to be part of it again."

In a hockey world that often feels transient, the CRJHL has become something rarer — a place people return to. Night after night, behind bench after bench, the past keeps showing up.

THE RETURN OF THE ALTONA MAROONS

For Byron Loeppky, bringing junior hockey back to Altona is about returning to the roots of what local hockey is supposed to be.

After several difficult seasons in the senior ranks, the Maroons' organization made the decision to pause operations and rethink its future. The problem, Loeppky said, was simple: there were no longer enough local players to sustain a competitive senior team.

"If you haven't got the ingredients, you just can't bake the cake," he said.

Rather than continually seeking special permission to bring in more out-of-town players, the group chose a different path — one that puts the emphasis back on developing and showcasing regional talent.

That led a group of hockey lovers in Altona to approach the Capital Region Junior B Hockey League about to see if there was an expansion opportunity. After all, the CRJHL offered the perfect geographic fit.

The new team will play out of the MEC Centre in Altona and is expected to be a regional squad rather than one made up strictly of local players. Loeppky estimates less than half the roster will come from the town itself.

While he is helping guide the project, Loeppky does not plan to be the general manager. Instead, the organization is bringing in a younger leadership group to handle hockey operations, recruiting and coaching hires.

Behind the scenes, a 10-person executive is already dividing up responsibilities ranging from sponsorship and equipment to game-day operations and social media. Meetings are scheduled every two weeks to keep the project on track.

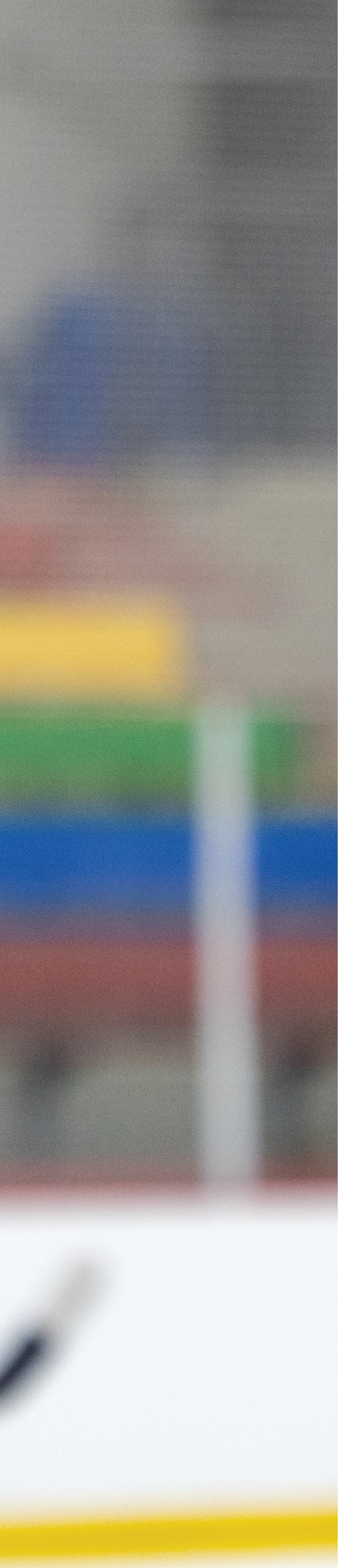
"We're not just building a team," Loeppky said. "We're building the structure to make sure this works long-term."



BYRON LOEPPKY (LEFT) AND SCOTT CHEREWAYKO OF THE ALTONA MAROONS



NCN DEFENCEMAN AND TEAM CAPTAIN SANDY TATTUINEE.



BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Ava Cameron and Kelly Jacobson

THE CAPTAIN

THIS SEASON, THE NCN FLAMES HAVE SEVEN PLAYERS FROM NUNAVUT ON THEIR KEYSTONE JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE ROSTER. THE LEADER OF THE PACK IS THREE-YEAR FLAMES' VETERAN DEFENCEMAN SANDY TATUINEE FROM RANKIN INLET, THE CAPTAIN OF A FLAMES TEAM THAT LEANS HEAVILY ON ITS TALENTED LADS FROM THE NORTH.

Calling from Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, shortly after Christmas, Sandy Tattuinee took a minute to check the weather report.

"It's minus-52 today," he said, matter-of-factly. "Not a big deal. It gets nicer in March. And it doesn't keep us from going outside to play hockey."

Tatuinee, 20, is the captain of the Keystone Junior Hockey League's NCN Flames. A graduate of the Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, he came down from Nunavut to the small town in Southwestern Manitoba for one season, then moved to Thompson. While in Thompson, he was encouraged to try out for the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Flames of the Keystone Jr. B Hockey League.

He made the team. Now, three years later, seven of his pals from Nunavut – Ben Tulugak, Mark Kalluak, Jimmy Ollie, Thayer and Ryley Komakjuak, Ray Pudlat Jr., and Kaden Eetuk -- wear the NCN Flames' colours and Sandy is the team's captain.



I started playing hockey when I was really young here in Rankin," Tattuinee said. "I started skating at our old rink. I played up here in Rankin while I was a kid and then, at 17, I moved down to Pilot Mound to play."

After Pilot Mound, he followed his girlfriend to Thompson and she was the one who suggested he try out for the Flames.

"Yeah, my girlfriend recommended I try out and so I went over there and had a good camp and made the team," he said. "I've really enjoyed my time here."

Flames general manager Nic Campbell is thrilled to have Tattuinee in his lineup, but he's also excited to have the seven others on the team.

"He moved here three years ago, and I don't really think he played much organized hockey anywhere prior to coming to us," said Campbell. "A lot of these kids just play up in Rankin and Arviat and play whatever they have there. Apparently, he had a girlfriend in Thompson. So, he moved to Thompson first and then he tried out with us. He made it three years ago as a forward and he was pretty good. Last year, we needed a D-man and I understand he played some D growing up, so he dropped back to D and this year he's playing very well."

Until he got to Pilot Mound, there weren't a lot of Tattuinee stats kicking around. Although he did play for Nunavut at the Arctic Winter Games in 2023 and won a gold medal. He had an assist in the championship game, a 4-1 win over Alaska, and called it, "a surreal moment."

He also played for Team Nunavut in Winnipeg in May of 2023 at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships. The boys from the North lost 10-4 to Manitoba in the quarterfinals and finished eighth. Nunavut has not sent a team to the NAHC since.



However, everywhere he's played in his brief stint in prep and junior hockey, Tattuinee has impressed his coaches.

"Sandy was a fierce competitor," said Red Lake Miners' head coach Billy Keane, who coached Tatuinee with the Pilot Mound Buffaloes in 2023. "He had a real interest in getting better every day. Sandy has some really solid skating skills."

"He's a good player," added Campbell, the Flames' GM. "Parrtly because of Sandy we have a couple of kids from Rankin Inlet, a couple from Arviat and one kid from Coral Harbour. The Norman North Stars U18 AAA team started expanding their scouting three or four years ago, bringing in kids from Nunavut. So, we've been picking up kids who graduate from that U18 program and then they recruit their own buddies to come here to NCN."

With a team full of young Nunavut players, the Flames got off to a decent start, winning nine of their first 16 games. Tattuinee, meanwhile, was outstanding, scoring 14 points in that span.

Not bad for a defenceman who has no problem playing forward.

"I started off as a forward when I was young," he explained. "My coach, David Clark, moved me back to D. So, I played D until I moved to Pilot Mound and then they put me up on forward. My first year playing with the Flames, I played forward then the second year, I went back as a D-man. I'd rather be a forward, but I'll play where the team needs me. I'm getting lots of icetime. Early in the season, I played 40 minutes in a game.

"I'm really enjoying it in NCN. It's been great, but when I'm finished, I'm going back home to Rankin. It's cold, but I enjoy it up here. My friends are here in Rankin. This is my home."

KEYSTONE JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



HUTTON FOSTER,
OCN STORM

AYDEN DANIELS,
PEGUIS JUNIORS

BRANNIGAN FERLAND,
NORWAY HOUSE NORTH STARS

ELECTRIC PRODUCTIVITY

BY JIM BENDER
Photos by James Carey Lauder

Connecting his captain to a future electrician sparked immediate chemistry between the two for Charleswood Hawks head coach Dillon Smith.

That captain, Elliott Lewis, helped Tyson Sperber realize his most productive seasons on the ice in years.

"Yeah, it's been good," said Sperber, 19. "We have some good chemistry. We've been together all of last year and we're pretty tight-knit in the dressing room, so it's been good."

After a frustrating experience with the former Winnipeg Freeze of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, Sperber turned his attention to the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League. In his first year with the Hawks, the right winger broke out with 29 goals and 81 points in 67 games, good for 11th in scoring in the league. Lewis was 10th with 83 points in 74 games.

"I thought I did pretty well for my first year in (the MMJHL) – kind of a younger, smaller guy," said the 5-foot-10, 172-pounder. "I probably made a name for myself, and it was a fun one. Just being younger and showing some older guys what I can do was good times. I didn't do amazing at the end of the year – stats wise. I kind of got into a bit of an injury but the start of the year was good and was fun."

Sperber suffered a shoulder injury that forced him to miss some games and still affected him when he returned.

But how did he make a name for himself?

"I just used my skill -- used what I knew and it just really worked out for me," Sperber said. "I was potting the puck a lot and finding my teammates really well,



TYSON SPERBER,
CHARLESWOOD HAWKS



and I just gelled really well in this league. I think this league is great. It's perfect for me. It's been really fun."

Sperber had soured on his MJHL experience but has found a new lease on hockey life in the new circuit.

"Great kid, great player," Smith said. "Second-year player with the team. He came to us last year. Real fun guy to be around and enjoys being at the rink. His teammates enjoy being around him.

"He skates real well. He handles the puck real well. He's able to create a lot of offence in different ways and makes the people around him better, which is always what we're looking for. He's a top scorer for us. He's in the top five or top 10 in league scoring right now, so he's had a really good start to the year, for sure."

Sperber was fourth in the MMJHL with 18 goals and 47 points in 30 games, leading the Hawks towards the end of January as he continued to play alongside Lewis.

"They've been together the majority of the year and then, kind of depending on some matchup stuff, there's been a rotation of left wingers that have been with them – either Nathan Vigfusson, one of our assistant captains, or one of our rookies. Keelan Briggs has been one of their other linemates, for the most part," Smith said.

Sperber missed some games because he took a trip to Mexico earlier this year but has been productive since then.

"It's been a really good year," he said. "Got off to a hot start, slowed down a little bit but hopefully, pick it up back in the new year. But yeah, the team's doing well. We're all having some fun and doing well. So, it's been good."

Sperber has been attracting more attention from opposing teams this season.

"I've got to use my wheels a bit to get around these bigger guys," he said. "They like to get after me a little bit. So, I like to use my skating and kinda try to weave through them, and it seems to work out."

Sperber has shown leadership qualities this year.

"He's not wearing a letter for us but he's definitely a big part of our leadership group, on or off the ice," Smith said. "He comes to the rink, works real hard and sets the pace for everyone."



Sperber once looked into the possibility of getting into a US college to play hockey but has since turned his focus to becoming an electrician.

"The league is kind of designed for guys to start their career path going to school," Smith said.

"I'm a first-level apprentice for Wescan Construction," Sperber said. "Right now, I'm working out of town (Neepawa) – four days on, three days off. The hockey schedule's a little bit tough for me right now just because I always miss the Tuesday practice. But the coach says, 'Sometimes, your working life and making money is a little more important than playing hockey and that's OK.' That's what I've come to terms with now and that's just the way it is."

Sperber wears No. 9 for a reason.

"I always liked (Winnipeg's) Jonathan Toews growing up, so I would always wear 19," he said. "Then, I switched it up to 93 and Lewis wears No. 19 now, so I just went No. 9."

Like most local fans, Sperber had been hoping Toews would have had more success with the Jets this season.

"That's okay, though," he said. "I will always remember what he did back in the day."

The Hawks were in fourth place in late January.

"We've gotten off to a good start," said Smith, who lost four players to graduation and others who decided not to return. "We had a pretty big turnover this year and came into the year with an open mind, and the players have definitely earned the right to call themselves a competitor this year.

"On any given night, we can have between eight and 10 first-year players in our lineup, so that's a pretty big turnover for us."

MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



COHEN CHEUNG, STONEWALL JETS

The MMJHL is a 10-team junior hockey league operating in and around the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The intent of the league is to provide a program for talented and competitive hockey players to continue their education or begin their careers. Players aged 17 to 21 years compete annually for the Jack McKenzie (league founder) Trophy.

WWW.MMJHL.CA



ETHAN WILDE, PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS PLAYER OF THE MONTH

GROWING WILDE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by James Carey Lauder

For head coach Chris Unger and the Pembina Valley Twisters, the team's progress hasn't just been measured in wins and losses.

Instead, it's been reflected in effort, belief, and the steady development of players who embody what the Twisters organization is trying to build. Few players represent that growth better than Ethan Wilde.

Unger, who has known Wilde longer than most of the roster — long before Wilde ever pulled on a Twisters jersey – it's been fun watching the 19-year-old get better.

"I've known Ethan for a few years," Unger said. "I coached him for one year in minor hockey when he was, I think, about 13 years old. He's 19 now, so I know him a little bit better than some of the other guys."

Without a doubt, that familiarity comes with a certain level of appreciation and trust.

"Ethan's from Carman and he's always been one of those guys that provides a combination of skill, an extremely hard work ethic, and just a desire to get better," Unger said. "He's the kind of person I really appreciate on our team because you know what you're going to get from him. It's 100 percent effort, all the time."

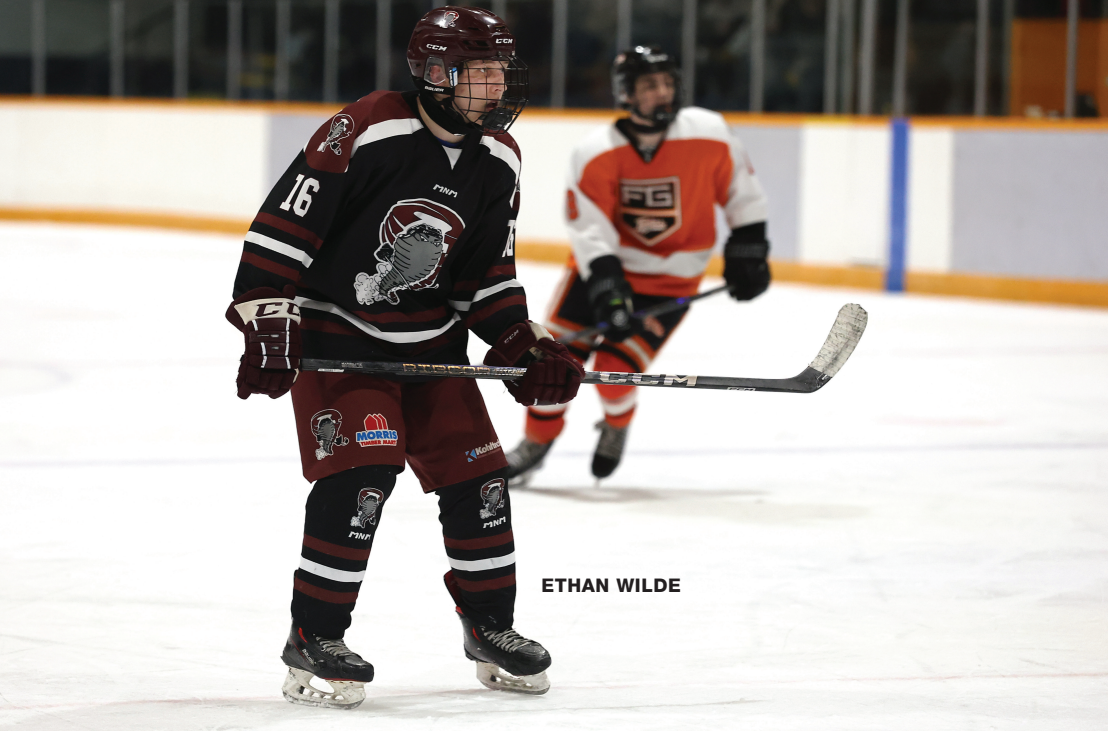
Wilde's hockey journey is one rooted in persistence, rather than shortcuts. He played all of his minor hockey in Carman, and according to Unger, was often close to making AAA, but not always quite there — a position many young players find discouraging.

"He played at least one year of AA, and he may have had a year of AAA with the Pembina Valley Hawks at U15," Unger explained. "After that, he played high school hockey with the Carman Cougars in the Zone 4 High School League."

Those experiences shaped Wilde into the kind of player who doesn't take opportunities for granted — something that has served him well at the junior level.

For Unger, who joined the Twisters this season, the team's growth has been immediate and encouraging.

"When I see where this team was when I started to where they are now, it's like night and day," he said. "We're competing. We've won a few games now, and I think we'll continue to get better."



ETHAN WILDE

In his first six games behind the bench, Unger's Twisters demonstrated flashes of what they're capable of accomplishing. Two wins, one narrow loss after a brief breakdown, and lessons learned against top MMJHL teams like St. Boniface and Transcona have all contributed to the team's recent development.

"If we can get ourselves into shape and continue to work on discipline and systems, there's no reason we shouldn't compete with those top teams a month or two from now," Unger said.

To his credit, Wilde has been right in the middle of that progress. A Carman product through and through, Wilde speaks fondly of his hometown and the path it provided him.

"Carman was an awesome place to be, and our team was awesome to be a part of," he said. "High school hockey was a great experience."

After graduating from high school, Wilde took a year off from hockey while attending the University of Manitoba. Now in his second year of Kinesiology at the U of M, he's balancing academics and junior hockey — something the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League allows players to do effectively.

That balance, of course, is one of the league's strengths.

"The MM is pretty good for that," said Wilde, who wants to be a Physical Education teacher when he finishes school. "It's not like having three or four practices a week and riding the bus all the time. The games and practices are manageable."

During the week, Wilde lives in Winnipeg to attend school, then travels to Morris to attend practices and home games.

"I'm near the U of M, so it's about a 30–35-minute drive to Morris for practice," he said. "It's manageable for sure."

One of the biggest changes this season was the arrival of Unger behind the bench — and Wilde has embraced the shift.

"It's awesome," Wilde said. "Chris is very old school, hard-nosed, and he expects a lot out of us. Practices are definitely tough, but it's great."

Under Unger, the Twisters have increased their physical play, something Wilde believes has made an immediate impact.

"His style is working really well for us," he said. "Being more physical, more engaged. We've only had a couple of practices under him because of weather cancellations, but once we get more practices in, things should really start rolling."

Wilde's work ethic extends beyond the rink. Although he grew up in town rather than on an area farm, he still embraced the outdoor lifestyle that rural Manitoba is known for.

"I love being outdoors," he said. "Hunting, fishing — anything outdoors, really."

Golf also ranks high on the list, especially with Carman's course close to home.

"I love Carman. I love the golf course. It's perfect."

Like many small-town athletes, Wilde played multiple sports growing up.

"I played everything except basketball," he said. "Volleyball, badminton, baseball — pretty much everything."

That multi-sport background has helped shape him into a well-rounded athlete — and person — something Unger values deeply.

As the Twisters continue their climb, players like Ethan Wilde represent the culture that's being built: effort-first, coachable players, and young men committed to improvement.

THREE-TIME MMJHL CHAMPION

PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS

ARE PROUD TO BE A PART OF THE
MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



MORRIS BIGWAY FOODS IS A PROUD SUPPORTER OF
THE PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS AND
THE MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

654 MAIN STREET MORRIS, MB, ROG 1K0 1-204-746-2411



CAPTAINS ALEX DYRLAND (RIGHT) AND TYLER MCCALLUM (LEFT) BATTLE FOR POSITION OFF THE FACE-OFF.

BY PAUL EDMONDS
Photos by James Carey Lauder

PRIMED FOR DRAFT DAY

It's an annual hockey Right of Spring - an exciting yet nervous and unpredictable time of year for any elite U15 player across Manitoba and the rest of Western Canada.

At some point during this U15 Winnipeg AAA Hockey League season, regional scouts from the Western Hockey League have reviewed, assessed and cross-referenced every player from the 15 member teams.

Their intention is to narrow a vast list of primarily 2011-born players to a group of high-stock individuals that would be worthy of selection in the 2026 WHL Prospects Draft, slated for May 7-8 in a virtual format.

During the course of the regular season and playoffs, players within this group understand that they're being watched closely to determine if their game fits a major junior path.

In many cases players have already experienced one-on-one conversations with certain teams, filled out questionnaires or through a third-party - such a family representative - understand some level of interest by the WHL in their future services.

Here at *Game On Magazine* - with the help of some WHL scouts - we have identified five U15 Winnipeg AAA Hockey League players that could be drafted. They are in no particular order and this list does not in any way guarantee selection in the WHL draft.

The draft proceeds as follows: Round 1 (May 7) and Rounds 2-7 (May 8)

Of course, there will be other 14 and 15-year-old players not identified on these pages that will possibly have their name called too, but for space purposes we were limited to creating a list of five only.

Since we're working with a group of five on our list, it is also interesting to note that over the past five WHL Prospect Drafts, an average of 32 players from Manitoba have been selected in each of the past five seasons with an impressive 38 taken in 2023.

Last season there were three Manitobans selected in the first round of the 2025 draft. They were: Reid Nicol (Brandon Wheat Kings, 5th overall – Everett), Mateo Ferreira (Winnipeg Bruins, 11th overall – Kamloops) and Crosby Mateychuk (Eastman Selects, 13th overall – Vancouver)

As in the past, the WHL's selection order is determined by the final standings of the 2025–26 WHL regular season, with a lottery held for the teams that were not playoff qualifiers.

The following are player profiles of five 2026 WHL Draft hopefuls:

KOEN BRAUNBERGER

Winnipeg Bruins Black U15 AAA

Age: 14
Position: Centre
Height: 5'09"
Weight: 145 Pounds
Shot: Left
Hometown: Winnipeg
School: *Churchill High School*

REGULAR SEASON STATS

YEAR	TEAM	LEAGUE	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM
2024-2025	Bruins	U15AAA	32	12	13	25	16
2025-2026	Bruins	U15AAA	30	37	56	93	39

2026-2027 OUTLOOK: U18 AAA Winnipeg Bruins



SCOUTING REPORT

Koen is a skilled player with the ability to make an impact when rushing the puck. He has a strong shot release and can shoot in stride, making him a danger to opposing teams inside the blueline. He also has a physical side to his game along with a prickly demeanour. In contrast, to reach his full potential, he'll need to focus on developing his non-rushing skills.

COACH'S REPORT

"He's a special player. He just has ability, leadership and poise. His talent, skating and shot are at an elite level. But most importantly he's a great kid, leader and captain. He's a voice in our room. When we need somebody to step up in a game, Koen is that player. I've seen him go from elite to super elite in seconds. He's strong and he's hard to contain when he's driving his legs. He's a great puck protector, thinks the game extremely well and reads the ice. And he doesn't play a shy game!" – *Dan Kaye*

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WHL DRAFT

"It's a big deal. It's big part of my life. It's a building block in my career in trying to move up to try and play professionally. I'd be happy to go to any team. It's definitely the No. 1 destination where I want to be playing in the next couple of years. But I'm trying to put it on the back burner and focus on our season with my team and to try and win a championship." – *Koen Braunberger*

ALEX DYRLAND

Winnipeg Thrashers Blue U15 AAA



Age: 15
Position: Centre/Left Wing
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 156 Pounds
Shot: Left
Hometown: Winnipeg
School: *Miles Macdonell Collegiate*

REGULAR SEASON STATS

YEAR	TEAM	LEAGUE	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM
2024-2025	Thrashers	U15AAA	31	7	8	15	6
2025-2026	Thrashers	U15AAA	32	30	30	60	28

2026-2027 OUTLOOK: U18 AAA Winnipeg Thrashers

SCOUTING REPORT

Alex's gameplay is characterized by his ability to drive the pace of the game. He makes plays that often result in scoring opportunities. He shows potential as an offensive-minded player who can create chances for himself and his teammates. While he excels at playing heads-up hockey, he also relies on his quick instincts to make decisions on the ice and at game speed.

COACH'S REPORT

"As a big strong player, Alex keeps his game simple. He's fast and uses his speed, size and shot to his advantage. He's hardworking with leadership skills both on-and-off the ice. He's been very consistent in any situation that helps our team. He's not afraid to battle and work the corners until he has the puck for himself. He's a solid 200-foot player who has anchored our special teams. We use him in any situation to defend. If we need a goal, he's going to be setting up the play or taking the shot. He's a solid kid." – *Ryan Gardner*

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WHL DRAFT

"It's always been a goal for me. It would be a huge accomplishment. And I don't care where I go, I just want the opportunity to get drafted. The WHL offers a lot of development and a pathway to expand your career. It's been a different season to be noticed this year. And it's hard to tell what the future holds, but my goal is to play (in the WHL) in a couple of years." – *Alex Dyrland*

TYLER McCALLUM

Winnipeg Bruins Gold U15 AAA



Age: 15
Position: Forward
Height: 5'08"
Weight: 137 Pounds
Shot: Left
Hometown: Winnipeg
School: *Linden Christian School*

REGULAR SEASON STATS

YEAR	TEAM	LEAGUE	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM
2024-2025	Bruins	U15AAA	32	10	14	24	4
2025-2026	Bruins	U15AAA	32	25	28	53	6

2026-2027 OUTLOOK: U18 AAA Winnipeg Bruins

SCOUTING REPORT

Tyler's playing style is a mix of scoring and two-way play, showcasing his ability to create offence while also contributing to other areas of the game. He has shown flashes of his goal-scoring potential, but to make an impact moving forward he will need to find ways to further separate himself from his peers. As he moves out of U15 after this season, you want to see him sustain his offensive level of production.

COACH'S REPORT

"He's our captain and takes pride in being our leader. He learned a lot from our championship team the year before and carried a lot of that leadership on. It's the simple things for him: working hard, being first in every drill and being prepared to play each night. He has a work ethic that every elite player has on both sides of the puck. He's smart, reads plays well, is quick on pucks with a solid and accurate shot. As a playmaker he makes others around him better. When the game is on the line, he's on the ice!" – *Chris McColm*

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WHL DRAFT

"I'm looking forward to (the draft). There's a little more pressure behind the scenes this year, but I try not to worry about that. I'll just play my game and not let it affect me. It's definitely the biggest step up. It's the place I want to be in the next couple of years. I want to get drafted as high as I can, but the round doesn't matter to me because you're always going to be need to prove yourself." – *Tyler McCallum*

NIXON GAUDET

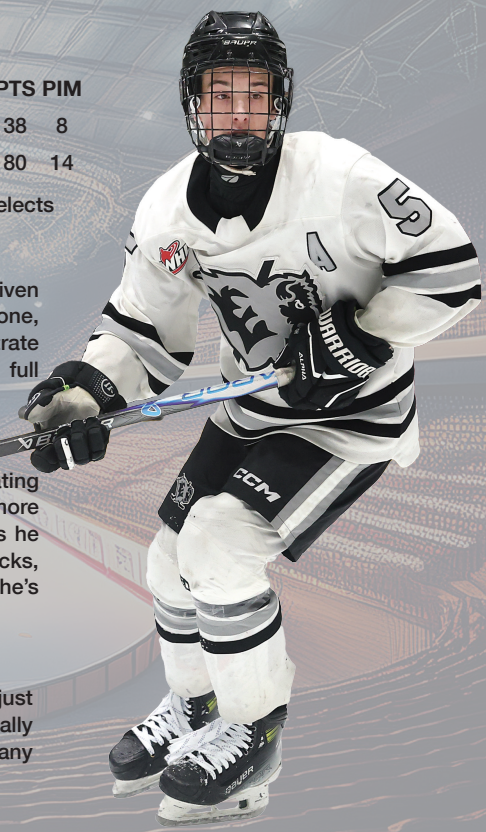
Eastman Selects U15 AAA

Age: 14
Position: Centre
Height: 5'07"
Weight: 137 Pounds
Shot: Right
Hometown: Ile de Chênes
School: *École Régional Gabrielle-Roy*

REGULAR SEASON STATS

YEAR	TEAM	LEAGUE	GP	G	A	PTS	PIM
2024-2025	Eastman	U15AAA	23	18	20	38	8
2025-2026	Eastman	U15AAA	32	53	27	80	14

2026-2027 OUTLOOK: U18 AAA Eastman Selects



SCOUTING REPORT

Nixon is a skilled player who excels in certain areas of his game. He generates shots when given space, indicating strong finishing ability. The release on his shot is high end. In his own zone, Gaudet shows improved engagement and battle skills. However, he will need to demonstrate increased effort and competitiveness against physically stronger players to reach his full potential at the next level.

COACH'S REPORT

"Skill-wise he's the most talented player I've ever coached. He's a fascinating kid. His skating and edgework are dynamic with an ability to pull away from the competition. He's become more physical even though he's a smaller player and that physicality helps him separate. He feels he can always make the play. His hockey sense and IQ are off the charts. He's hard to push off pucks, his toe-drag release is filthy, and he puts the puck where he wants. He does his homework; he's prepared." – *Gerald Tetrault*

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WHL DRAFT

"I've thought about it a lot. There's pressure, but I'm trying not to worry about it. I'm just concentrating on helping my team finish the season and see where it (the draft) goes. I'm really excited about it. It's fun to talk to scouts. It's a year where you make that one big step of many steps in your career." – *Nixon Gaudet*

CHAMP VANNUS

Winnipeg Thrashers Blue U15 AAA

Age: 14
Position: Goaltender
Height: 5'11"
Weight: 178 Pounds
Shot: Left
Hometown: East St. Paul
School: *River East Collegiate*

REGULAR SEASON STATS

YEAR	TEAM	LEAGUE	GP	GAA	SV%	SO	W-L-T
2024-2025	Thrashers	U15AAA	19	4.04	.895	1	8-11-0
2025-2026	Thrashers	U15AAA	19	3.15	.910	1	8-10-1

2026-2027 OUTLOOK: U18 AAA Winnipeg Thrashers



SCOUTING REPORT

Champ is a goaltender that showcases impressive athleticism and a strong work ethic. He is known for battling for every puck and competing fiercely, which helps keep his team in games. His technical skill is notable, as he demonstrates strength and focus. His size is a benefit to the goaltending position.

COACH'S REPORT

"He's a very competitive player. He wants to be in the big games and loves being in the net. He's going to fight for every save. He's very athletic, trustworthy and always dialed in before games and practices. You can tell he really wants to get to the next level. And that desire is only going to grow. He moves very well in his crease and he's always trying to get better each day. He's a very good goalie. He keeps it simple but can drive to make saves. He gives us a really good chance to win hockey games every night." – *Ryan Gardner*

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON WHL DRAFT

"I've thought about it every day since the season started. I'll play anywhere and to the best of my ability. It's hard to believe sometimes that I'm in this situation, because earlier in my career I was playing at lower levels and now I realize how much hockey can give me. The ultimate goal is to play in the WHL. I'm obviously really excited, but nervous. Hopefully I'll get my name called." – *Champ Vannus*

EXPEDIA
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YOUR HEART.
RIGHT PLACE.
Discover trip ideas throughout this special supplement and find more ideas at travelmanitoba.com/YourHeartRightPlace.
MANITOBA

Spring Break Family Fun in Manitoba

Get ready for some family fun this spring break in Manitoba! Whether you choose to stay close to home or venture out on a road trip, there's plenty to keep kids busy in the province when school's out. From special museum programming to outdoor adventures to kid-friendly events, the week promises to provide something for everyone. Read on for the best family-friendly things to do this spring break in Manitoba.



SPRUCE WOODS PROVINCIAL PARK



ROYAL MANITOBA WINTER FAIR

PHOTO: ROYAL MANITOBA FAIR



ROYAL AVIATION MUSEUM OF WESTERN CANADA

1 It wouldn't be spring break without the **Royal Manitoba Winter Fair**! Held annually in Brandon, RMWF is one of Western Canada's largest agricultural events and is a blast for the whole family. Experience show jumping, heavy horse competitions, livestock displays, live entertainment and so much more.

2 Do you have a Paw Patrol fan at home? **Paw Patrol Live! A Mighty Adventure** is taking place April 4th at Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall. Watch as Chase, Skye, Marshall and the whole gang save Adventure City with their Mighty Pup Powers.

3 The **Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada** offers special spring break programming every year. This year's theme? Astronauts! Also check out Storytime with a Pilot held at 11 a.m. on April 2nd.

4 With **93 provincial parks in Manitoba**, there's no shortage of outdoor exploration to be had during spring break. Explore a provincial park you've never been to before... who knows, it might become a family favourite!

5 **FortWhyte Alive** is open daily from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. and offers plenty to keep families busy during spring break, including hiking, cycling and wildlife viewing. Alive in the Woods, a line-up of self-guided experiences, allows families to take part in various nature-inspired games, crafts, activities and more (held on March 28th and April 4th). There's also a Bonfire Marshmallow Roast on March 28th and a Guided Family Snowshoe on March 29th (snowshoes available to rent).



PHOTO: JOSEPH VISSER COURTESY OF FORTWHYTE ALIVE



6 Don't know how to fill an afternoon? Head to **The Forks**. There truly is something for everyone in the family here, with incredible dining options, local shops, lively events and a lot to explore both inside and outdoors. One suggested activity? Try to locate as many public artworks as you can.



7 The spring migration is beginning! Hundreds of species of birds are returning to Manitoba as the snow melts. Pembina Valley is known as the province's "**Raptor Highway**", and thousands of red-tailed hawks, eagles and other raptors will pass through this spring. **Delta Marsh** is another exceptional birding spot at this time of year, especially for waterfowl and songbirds. Grab the binoculars and head out on a family adventure to see how many you can spot!

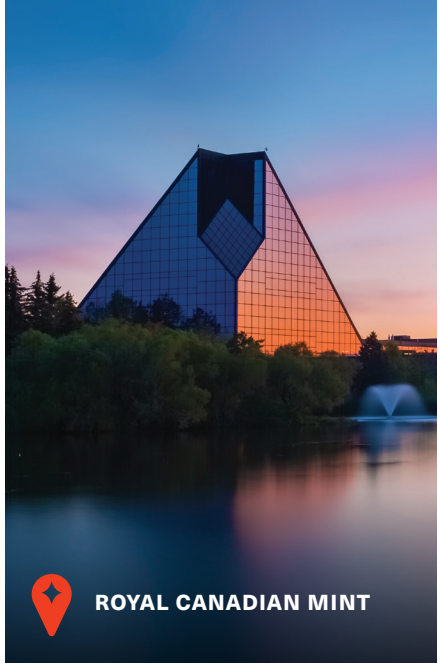
8 For older children and teens who love all things Tolkien, check out **The Music of The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit & The Rings of Power in Concert** at the Centennial Concert Hall on March 31st. The performance includes a guest star and the most memorable music from the films, from the menacing soundtrack of Mordor to the beautiful melodies of the elves.

9 Your local public library is open this spring break! All ages are sure to find something inspiring to read. Check for free event programming, such as a **Family Art Afternoon**.

10 Spend an afternoon at the **Canadian Museum for Human Rights**. Take your time in the exhibitions and enjoy their special spring break programming. The museum is ideal for older children who are ready to have conversations about history and civil rights.



PHOTO: ASESSIPPI SKI AREA & RESORT





11 The annual **Slush Cup at Asessippi Ski Resort** is back! The Slush Cup is a hilarious way to say goodbye to the ski season and welcome the warmer weather. Watch as costumed skiers and snowboarders go down a run and attempt to skim a pool of water. Stick around for the prizes, which include best costume, best trick and many more fun categories.

12 Visiting **Assiniboine Park** is always a fantastic time for the entire family. Spend time at the **Assiniboine Park Zoo** and **The Leaf** to learn about flora and fauna from around the world. There's also a spring break camp for children ages 6 to 12.

13 While many provincial park campgrounds may not be open yet, there are plenty of year-round lodges within or near parks that allow you to explore the surrounding area. Head to **Elkhorn Resort**, **Falcon Trails Resort** or **Paint Lake Lodge**.

14 Budding astronomers will love a trip to a dark sky preserve. Head to **Spruce Woods Provincial Park** to spot as many falling stars as you can.

15 The **Royal Canadian Mint** holds tours that aim to be both entertaining and educational, making it a perfect activity for the whole family. Family admission rates are available.

16 Spend the week learning more about Indigenous heritage in Manitoba. Visit Explore Indigenous at The Forks and take a walking tour with **Turtle Tours** (*Those Who Made the Winter* runs until March 31st). Afterwards, eat at **Promenade Brasserie**, **Feast Cafe Bistro** or **Bistro on Notre Dame**.

17 Enjoy a few games (and a lot of laughs) at one of the province's arcades, recreation rooms or bowling alleys. Check out **The Game Room** in Thompson, **T-Birds** in Brandon, **The Rec Room** in Winnipeg or **VB's Entertainment Centre** in Winkler. Love family board game nights? Head to **Across the Board Game Café** in Winnipeg's Exchange District.



CANADIAN FOSSIL DISCOVERY CENTRE

18 **Pineridge Hollow** is always a hit with children of all ages. Enjoy multiple dining options, shops featuring local products and a petting zoo. Keep an eye out for pop-up markets and kids' workshops over spring break.

19 Calling all fans of Bridgerton! The theme for **afternoon tea at the Fairmont Winnipeg** during spring break is "Unmasked", inspired by the popular Netflix show. With two seatings every Sunday, the artfully arranged experience is perfect for kids who love a bit of opulence. Children can attend at a discounted rate, and all dietary requirements can be catered to with notice (including gluten-free and vegetarian requirements). Reservations required.

20 If dinosaurs are big in your household, take a trip to Morden this spring break. Dinophiles will love the **Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre**, home to the largest collection of marine reptile fossils in Canada (including Bruce, the largest publicly displayed mosasaur in the world). Also check out the prehistoric marine reptile statues around town for some fun photo ops.

21 Take advantage of free kids' programming in the province at local community centres, including swimming and free play. While some centres are closed during spring break, there are many that remain open. Head to the City of Winnipeg's website for the leisure guide to find listings of activities and contact information for individual centres in Winnipeg.

22 Plenty of hotels around Manitoba have pools and even waterparks, making them the perfect getaway with kids. Check out Canad Inns locations in **Brandon** or **Portage la Prairie** for Splasher's, an onsite waterpark. The **Lakeview Hecla Resort** is another solid choice for an indoor pool and waterslide.

23 Try indoor rock climbing at **Central Plains RecPlex** in Portage la Prairie or **Vertical Adventures** or **The Hive** in Winnipeg (both of which have family discount packages).

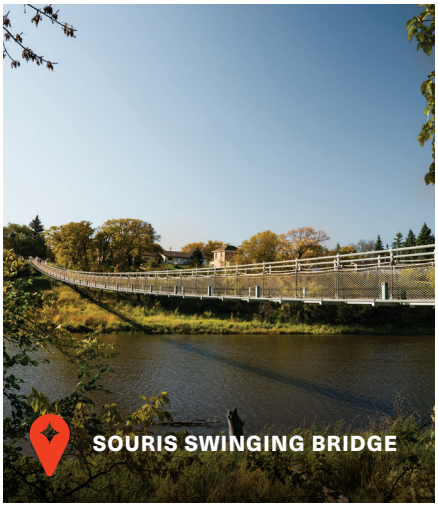
24 Check out your little one's favourite museum this spring break! Head to the **Children's Museum** or the **Manitoba Museum** in Winnipeg, both of which also offer spring break camps for kids.

25 **Riding Mountain National Park** is an excellent spring break destination. Explore the outdoors along numerous family-friendly hiking and biking trails, including the Ominnik Marsh Trail in Wasagaming (which is accessible for wheelchairs and strollers). **Friends of Riding Mountain National Park** provides rentals such as fat bikes or a "Scavenger Hunt/ Marsh Kit", perfect for families.











26 Souris is home to Canada's **longest swinging bridge**. Walk across the 184-metre pedestrian footbridge and then head to nearby Victoria Park, where you can explore the playgrounds, Looking Tower and Heritage Tree (the "new" Old Oak Tree, which is estimated to be approximately 440 years old).

27 Hiking trails may be slushy, but that just adds to the family fun! Bask in the warmer weather and hit the trails across the province. Family-friendly trails include the **Cedar Bog Trail** in Birds Hill Provincial Park, the **Boyne Valley Walking Trail** in Treherne, the **Seine River Greenway** in Winnipeg and the **Grace Lake Boardwalk and Boreal Trail** near The Pas.

28 **Geocaching** is an activity the entire family can get into. This spring break, hit up some of Manitoba's favourite geocaching locations, including **Whiteshell Provincial Park** and Winnipeg's **Assiniboine Forest**.

29 Cheer on the home team this spring break! Catch the **Manitoba Moose** versus the Grand Rapids Griffins on April 3rd and 4th.

30 Take a culinary adventure around the world (without leaving the province). Trying new foods together as a family is a great way to make memories and discover new favourites! Try Mexican restaurants in Winkler, Indian cuisine in Brandon or head to The Forks in Winnipeg and count how many international dishes you can try.

31 Gimli is perfect for a spring break vacation. Families can dress up like Vikings at the **New Iceland Heritage Museum**, hike the nearby trails in Camp Morton Provincial Park, shop at **H.P. Tergesen & Sons** (the oldest operating general store in Manitoba), try to get a strike at **Bowlers** and eat at family-friendly restaurants such as **Interlake Brewing Co.** or **Brennivins Pizza Hus**. Depending on the weather and ice conditions, fishing may also an option.


NEW ICELAND HERITAGE MUSEUM

PHOTO: DAN HARPER

32 There's nothing like an afternoon at the movies. Catch a flick at your local cinema; some Cineplex cinemas offer **Family Favourites programs** on Saturdays.

33 Enjoy the many biking trails of Manitoba. Family-friendly cycling paths include the **Ironwood Trail** in Pinawa and the **Kildonan Park Loop** in Winnipeg, while more advanced riders will love the paths of **Riding Mountain National Park** and the **Atikameg Trails** in **Clearwater Lake Provincial Park** (provided the snow and ice have melted, of course).

34 For a spring break trip the kids will never forget, book a geodesic dome. Surrounded by nature, it's the perfect way to connect as a family. Try **Glamping InStead**, **Moonlit Canopy** or **Wild Skies Resort**.


WILD SKIES RESORT

PHOTO: MEGAN STEEN COURTESY OF WILD SKIES RESORT

35 Manitoba's rivers and lakes are starting to thaw, which means that waterfalls are beginning to flow in full force again. Take a road trip to visit **Rainbow Falls**, **Pisew Falls** or **Wekusko Falls**, all of which are easy to access from the parking lot/road.

36 **Oak Hammock Marsh** is an amazing place to experience nature this spring break. Visit the **discovery centre**, walk the nature trails and try to spot the many migrating birds that are returning to the wetlands after winter. There's also a **spring camp** for kids aged 6 to 9.



PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE



GLADSTONE


QAUMAJUQ


WEKUSKO FALLS PROVINCIAL PARK

37 Kids will love road tripping to spot as many landmarks around Manitoba as possible. Choose your own adventure by searching for landmarks such as the **World's Largest Coca Cola Can** in Portage la Prairie, **Happy Rock** in Gladstone, **Sunny the Banana** in Melita or **Sarah the Camel** in Glenboro.

38 **Winnipeg Art Gallery – Qaumajuq** is a fabulous place to spend a few hours. Discuss your favourite works of art and bring sketchbooks to create some art of your own. There's also a spring break camp held at the WAG for young artists aged 7 to 11.

39 Pack some snacks and head out on a nature walk. Explore the **Brandon Riverbank**, the **Millennium Trail** in Thompson or **Flinty's Boardwalk and Trail** in Flin Flon. How many different plants and animals can you see along the way?

40 **Turtle Mountain Adventure Huts** are open all year round! Enjoy the blossoming spring weather with a stay in one of the locally designed huts, complete with nearby hiking and biking trails. Just don't forget to pack the marshmallows for an evening campfire.

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FROM LEFT, CHURCHILL HOCKEY ACADEMY COACHES MATT VARNES, NICO LABOSSIERE AND JESSE KLYM



BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Scott Taylor and James Carey Lauder

A Day in the Life:

INSIDE THE CHURCHILL HOCKEY ACADEMY

FOR THE LAST DECADE, THE CHURCHILL HOCKEY ACADEMY HAS QUIETLY BECOME ONE OF MANITOBA'S MOST RELIABLE DEVELOPMENT PIPELINES, PRODUCING ELITE PLAYERS—AND WELL-ROUNDED YOUNG PEOPLE—ONE EARLY MORNING AT A TIME.

At 7:20 a.m., while most Grade 7 students are still rubbing sleep from their eyes or stuffing books into backpacks, the lights are already on at the rink. Skates clack against the synthetic rubber flooring of the Southdale Arena dressing rooms. Helmets snap into place. There's laughter, music and the low hum of anticipation that only hockey players know.

This is just another day at the Churchill Hockey Academy (CHA)-a development program at College Churchill High School in Winnipeg School Division. For hockey academy students, these mornings become some of the most formative hours of their lives.

Founded on a simple but ambitious vision, Churchill Hockey Academy blends public-school education with elite hockey development, emphasizing skill acquisition, fitness, discipline, and personal growth. Over the years, that vision has produced results that now speak loudly across junior, collegiate and professional hockey.

Detroit Red Wings first-round pick Carter Bear sharpened his game here. So did Winnipeg Jets third-rounder Owen Martin. NCAA Division I players like Linnea Misner, Jordan Nishi, and Jayden Perron all spent formative years at Churchill. WHL standouts Brek Liske, Alexandre Andre, Zach Lansard, Jett Lajoie, and Tyden Lafournaise, along with USHL players Hudson Kowalchuk and Avery Laliberte, all came through the program.

This season alone, three Churchill students—Trevor Toyne, Owen Murray, and Logan German—played pivotal roles in leading Manitoba to a rare WHL Cup championship, while multiple academy graduates filled spots on provincial female U16 and U18 teams.



CHA COACH MATT VARNES SETS UP A DRILL

Yet for teacher and instructor Matt Varnes, the real success story begins long before there are any draft picks and trophies.

BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP

Varnes has been with the academy since its earliest days, watching it grow from a small experiment into a full-scale development program serving Grades 7 through high school.

"About 11 years ago, teacher Tim Friesen and vice-principal Dom Zagari saw a need for something like this," Varnes explained. "They'd gone through minor hockey with their own kids and felt there was a gap—something that could work *within* the public-school system, not outside it."

With support from then-principal Donna Miller, the academy officially launched during the 2016-17 school year with about 25 Grade 7 students and roughly 140 hours of ice time. Varnes, then a student teacher, offered to help wherever he could.

"I said, 'Hey, can I help out?' and Tim said he'd always take free help," Varnes laughed. "That's how I got my feet wet—learning everything from edge work and skating mechanics to puck skills and gameplay."

Growth came quickly. Within a year, the program expanded. Within a few more, the academy pushed into high school—a pivotal move that allowed athletes to continue developing without choosing between education and elite training.

"That was when Carter Bear decided to stick around," Varnes said. "From there, it's been constant growth."

A MORNING THAT MATTERS

For Grade 7 students, the day begins early—very early.

"Our first ice is at 7:45," Varnes explained. "We've got another ice at 8:00, and we also rotate a group through the weight room."

The schedule changes slightly depending on the day, but the rhythm is consistent. Mondays include health classes aligned with Manitoba Physical Education curriculum, while Tuesdays through Thursdays balance ice sessions and strength training. Fridays are intentionally lighter.

"We keep Fridays fun," said Varnes. "Small-area games, lower-organized gym activities. We want kids to love being here."

Grade 8 students follow nearly the same structure, just shifted later in the morning. Their ice sessions begin at 9:00 and 9:15, before returning to school for blended academic blocks—math and science combined, or English and social studies paired together—followed by afternoon classes.

High school students experience a more advanced version of the model. Skills developed in Grades 7 and 8



COACH VARNES PASSES ON A FEW TIPS.

are now applied to situational and positional hockey.

"This is where we differentiate," Varnes said. "Forwards work on forward-specific reads. Defencemen focus on defensive scenarios. Everything becomes more game-like."

A key piece of that progression is Larry Woo, who works with high school players daily, supported by guest instructors like Excessive Speed and academy staff.

By the time students return to school for the afternoon—or head back after an ice session—they've already logged high-performance training before most of their peers have opened a textbook.

MORE THAN HOCKEY SKILLS

For Jesse Klym, a hockey academy instructor and physical education teacher, the benefits extend well beyond the rink.

"I've seen drastic improvement," Klym said. "Not just on the ice—but socially. You have kids who come in shy, almost socially awkward, and within a couple of years they're confident, outgoing, leaders."

Klym rotates between on-ice instruction, health education, and the weight room, arriving at the rink before 7:30 every morning. It's a long day—but one that rarely feels like work.

"It's incredibly rewarding," he said. "Growing up playing hockey, being able to relate to these kids every day—it doesn't feel like a job."

Academy students, he noted, are often in the best physical condition in the entire school. They train consistently, learn proper habits, and apply those lessons both with their academy group and their community teams.

"They're working hard with us, and then they're going back to their teams at night," Klym said. "That carries over."

Teachers at the school have noticed the difference as well.

"They're calmer," Varnes added. "They've burned off energy. They're focused. We hear that feedback all the time."

BUILDING STRONG, SMART ATHLETES

In the weight room, strength and on-ice coach Nico Labossiere focuses on long-term athletic development rather than short-term gains.

"At the start of the year, it's all about foundations," Labossiere explained. "Proper form, body awareness, understanding how movements should feel."

For Grades 7 and 8, that means mastering basic patterns—squats, hinges, pushes, pulls—before progressing to more advanced variations. High school athletes move faster into complex lifts, but always with an eye on hockey demands and seasonal workload.

"As playoffs approach, we dial things back," LaBossiere said. "More mobility, more functional work. We don't want kids sore when they're playing meaningful games."

Equally important is education. Nutrition, hydration, sleep, and recovery are baked into the program, not treated as afterthoughts.

"These kids are on the ice 80 to 100 hours more than their peers," Labossiere says. "So taking care of their bodies becomes even more critical."

LONG DAYS, LIFELONG IMPACT

After the academy sessions, students head back to school. Then come team practices or games in the evening. Sleep can be scarce. Days are full.

Yet ask former students what they remember most, and the answers are remarkably consistent.

"They say it was the best time of their lives," Varnes beamed. "The friendships. The camaraderie. Being part of something."

That sense of community—supported by dedicated instructors, structured development, and academic accountability—is what sets Churchill Hockey Academy apart.

It's not just about producing elite players. It's about creating disciplined, confident young people who know how to manage time, push themselves, and support teammates.

And it all starts early in the morning, under bright rink lights, long before the rest of the day begins.

For further information about the Churchill Hockey Academy, go to *https://www.churchillhigh.ca*



MAVERICKS COACHES BILL BRAM AND CAMILLE ENNS

BUILDING A FUTURE MODEL

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman and Dave Mahussier

New approaches aren't always accepted as quickly as we'd like.

But for Jeff Rotinsky, Camille Enns, and Bill Bram, building the Manitoba Mavericks female hockey program is worth the effort — because it offers something different, and something bigger, without the prep-school price tag.

This season marks the Manitoba Mavericks' inaugural entry into the Female Super League's 11-team U14 division. Drawing players from Winnipeg and rural Manitoba, the Mavericks are navigating their first FSL season against established programs from across Western Canada.

The Mavericks are creating something new in the province: a high-performance female hockey development program designed to provide elite young players with prep-level opportunity while allowing them to remain in their home communities and schools.

Still early in its development, the program is built around a clear belief — elite development starts with elite coaching. The organization has made a deliberate commitment to valuing and compensating coaches appropriately, recognizing that coaching quality is central to meaningful player growth.

That philosophy led the Mavericks to assemble a coaching staff led by veteran coach Bill Bram and University of Manitoba Bisons alumna Camille Enns — both deeply experienced in high-performance female hockey and long-time contributors within Hockey Manitoba.

Veteran coach Bill Bram of Ste. Anne — widely regarded as a provincial coaching legend — was sought out for his experience and knowledge. Bram has won U18 AAA provincial championships with Eastman and has coached six players from Ste. Anne who went on to represent Canada at the national level, including his daughter, Bailey Bram, an Olympic silver medalist, and Jocelyne Larocque, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and Olympic silver medalist. Larocque has gone on record with Hockey Canada identifying Bram as her favourite minor hockey coach.

At the center of the program's growth is Enns herself. A recent University of Manitoba Bisons graduate and former team MVP, Enns stepped into a leadership role earlier than expected.

Originally hired as an assistant coach to bring a female perspective to the bench, Enns was quickly given the opportunity to step into a head coaching role. This season, she and Bram officially share co-head coaching duties.

"It was my first year as a head coach, so I was nervous," Enns said. "With a new program, you want stability and credibility. I knew I needed someone experienced, so I asked Bill to do this with me."

Bram offered his support.

"I told her, 'If you need any help, let me know,'" he said. "Next thing I know, I'm co-coaching."

After researching the Female Super League and meeting with league leadership, both coaches embraced the opportunity to help build a development-first pathway for female athletes in Manitoba.

The partnership allows Enns to focus heavily on player development while learning the logistical and leadership demands of running a high-performance team — from early-morning practices to long road trips across the Prairies.



"This isn't a two-practices-a-week club team," Enns said. "We're putting in real time — four practices a week, strength training, skill sessions. And the travel — managing 17 kids on the road is something you don't fully understand until you're doing it."

On the ice, the Female Super League mirrors prep-style programs. The Mavericks play a 32-game regular season, a mid-season tournament, and playoffs, while practicing up to four times per week. Games are played in three 20-minute periods and are often livestreamed or televised with full play-by-play commentary.

"If parents can't make it to a game, they can still watch," Enns said. "And for the girls, it creates accountability. This is your legacy on the ice."

Importantly, Mavericks players remain in their home schools and communities, avoiding the upheaval of traditional prep models. With athletes coming from Winnipeg, Morden, Île-des-Chênes, and beyond, that flexibility is key. One Mavericks athlete relocated from Yellowknife to Winnipeg through a billet arrangement to join the program.

"At 14, it matters that you don't have to leave your school and friends while adjusting to a new hockey environment," Enns said.

For Enns, the Mavericks also fill a critical gap in Manitoba's female development system, particularly following the closure of Winnipeg's St. Mary's Academy hockey program.

"I played AAA in Eastman because prep school wasn't an option financially," she said. "Not every family can spend $30,000 a year. This gives girls who are good enough — but don't have those resources — a legitimate opportunity."

However, like all FSL teams, the Mavericks are currently considered non-sanctioned by Hockey Manitoba under regulations aligned with Hockey Canada. As a result, players competing in the league are ineligible for Hockey Manitoba's Program of Excellence.

"The designation is not related to safety or insurance," Rotinsky explained. "The Female Super League carries equivalent insurance coverage through the same underwriters used by Hockey Canada, including Lloyd's of London. The Mavericks also carry additional insurance coverage for practices and scrimmages held in Winnipeg, providing an added layer of protection for athletes and families.

"We made multiple attempts to work collaboratively with Hockey Manitoba, including exploring whether additional fees could be paid to allow athletes to remain eligible for the Program of Excellence while competing in the FSL. Sadly, there was no willingness to reconsider the policy."

For families, the issue goes beyond logistics. Many players are proud Manitobans who aspire to represent their province at the highest level, yet feel conflicted about choosing a development path they believe best supports their long-term growth.

The FSL operates independently from provincial branches — a structure that has created challenges but also flexibility. League officials emphasize a strong rulebook shaped by experienced coaches, officials and former professional players.

Since its inaugural season, the Female Super League has more than doubled in size. Its long-term vision is to provide a credible, affordable development option that complements — rather than replaces — existing hockey structures.

As the Mavericks program continues to gain momentum, interest from players and families across the province has increased steadily. That growth has led the organization to explore expansion opportunities, including the potential addition of a 16U team within the Female Super League. The goal would be to help bridge the development gap for athletes who may not have the opportunity to play U18 AAA within Hockey Manitoba, while still providing a high-performance environment to support continued progression.

"You're playing against the best," Bram said. "That's how players learn what it actually takes."

For Enns, the payoff is clear.

"This program isn't about shortcuts," she said. "It's about work, accountability, and giving girls a real chance to chase their goals without having to leave home."

For the Manitoba Mavericks, the mission is simple but ambitious: prove that elite development doesn't require a prep-school price tag — only commitment, opportunity, and the courage to build something new.

THE FEMALE SUPER LEAGUE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos courtesy of the FSL

THE FSL IS BRINGING A NEW DEVELOPMENT MODEL TO MANITOBA FEMALE HOCKEY. IT PROMISES TO HAVE A VERY BRIGHT FUTURE.

For Manitoba Mavericks president and general manager Jeff Rotinsky, a new development pathway is gaining traction in Manitoba female hockey.

It's a concept that offers elite young players a prep-style experience — without forcing them into expensive prep schools or boys' leagues.

The Female Super League (FSL) is a Western Canadian high-performance league created to address long-standing gaps in female player development. The Manitoba Mavericks are in their inaugural season in the FSL, and interest in the program is growing steadily as families seek alternatives that prioritize meaningful ice time, coaching quality, and player exposure.

"At its core, this is about opportunity," said Tyrel Spitzer, vice-president of the Female Super League. "We kept hearing the same thing across Western Canada: the journey for girls to reach the top levels is much harder than it needs to be."

Spitzer said the idea for the FSL emerged after years of operating successful high-performance models on the boys' side. While elite opportunities exist for girls at the U18 AAA level, he said the path leading there is inconsistent, particularly between ages 12 and 16.



FEMALE SUPER LEAGUE VICE-PRESIDENT TYREL SPITZER

"In many regions, girls get fewer practices, fewer development hours, and less consistent coaching than boys," Spitzer said. "Some of the top female athletes were choosing boys hockey simply to get better ice time and competition."

The FSL was designed as a borderless, development-first league with a higher practice-to-game ratio, extensive travel, video review, and exposure to top-level competition across Canada's western provinces.

One of the league's most notable features is progressive body contact — a first for organized female hockey at this level.

"These girls are already playing contact in boys' hockey," Spitzer said. "The question was: why not let them develop those same skills against their peers, in a controlled, properly taught environment?"

The results, he said, were immediate.

"The confidence around the puck, the awareness, the pace of play — it was a completely different game," Spitzer said. "The development jump was undeniable."

In Manitoba, the Mavericks draws players from across Winnipeg and rural Manitoba and competes in the FSL's 11-team U14 division. It's a schedule comparable to prep programs — while practicing up to four times per week.

"This is as close to a professional environment as these girls will see at this age," said Rotinsky. "They feel like pro athletes, and they're treated like pro athletes."

"We've seen players move provinces because they believe in this model," Rotinsky said.

The FSL operates independently from provincial hockey branches, a reality that has created challenges but also flexibility. Spitzer emphasized the league carries full private insurance coverage and follows a structured rulebook developed with input from high-level coaches, officials, and former professional players.

League commissioner Haley Runnalls, a former elite coach and educator, has been central to shaping the league's philosophy.

"She understands female athletes and how they learn," Spitzer said. "That passion is what drives this league forward."

The FSL has more than doubled in size since its inaugural season and now operates multiple divisions across Western Canada. Organizers say the long-term vision is simple: provide a credible, affordable development option that complements — rather than replaces — existing hockey structures.

And, as interest continues to grow, the Female Super League appears poised to become a permanent part of the female hockey landscape — offering a new route for players determined to reach the next level.

For further information click on www.femalesuperleague.com

THE LONG VIEW ATHLETE

BY CARTER BROOKS
Photos by Dylan Asmundson

At the RINK, development rarely announces itself all at once. It doesn't arrive with a breakout weekend or a sudden spike in attention. More often, it shows up quietly — in routines repeated, expectations met and habits built over time. For those who stay long enough, progress compounds.

Sixteen-year-old Spencer Kuntz is one of those athletes.

Now in his third year with RINK Hockey Academy, the U18 Prep captain's path has followed a steady, intentional arc: U15 Prep, U17 Prep, and now U18 Prep — each season building on the last. It's not a story defined by God-given talent or skill, but rather patience, practice and trust in the process.

When RINK U18 Prep head coach Rob Smith looks back to Kuntz's arrival, he doesn't recall immediate impact. He remembers intent. Kuntz was a late addition during his U15 Prep year, a player the staff had identified and wanted, even if the timing took some work.

"There was a lot of belief in him early," Smith told *Game On*. "We wanted him here, and once he arrived, the goal was never short-term results. It was about giving him time."

Time is part of the RINK model. Rather than chasing immediate outcomes, the program emphasizes structure — academically, physically, and on the ice — knowing real growth takes time. Kuntz's family bought into that early, committing not just to hockey development, but to stability and education as well.

That continuity proved critical. The six-foot-one, 180-pound defenceman didn't bounce between programs or reset his environment. Instead, he stayed, trained and allowed development to unfold naturally. Over three seasons, his role expanded. His confidence grew and his understanding of the game deepened.

"Nothing happens right away," Kuntz said. "The development here is amazing, but it takes time. You have to be patient and trust what the coaches are building."

From a hockey standpoint, Kuntz's assistant coach Evan Kaufman has seen that evolution up close. Early on, Kaufman recalls flashes of vision — moments where Kuntz saw the ice well, but hadn't yet put all the pieces together. Fast forward to today, and the picture is much clearer.

"He's become a puck-moving defenceman who can really see the ice," Kaufman shared. "He's good on the power play, makes a strong first pass, and knows when to engage and when to pull out. He's much more well-rounded now."

That maturation didn't come from shortcuts. It came from daily repetitions – many of which at the RINK. Kaufman points to routine as



"REAL GROWTH HAPPENS OVER MULTIPLE YEARS. IT DOESN'T SHOW UP ALL AT ONCE."

– ROB SMITH



a defining factor in Kuntz's development. Gym sessions started on time, with extra reps built into daily habits. Video wasn't something done passively — Kuntz asked for it, sought feedback, and wanted to understand where he could improve. Those tools were always available at RINK. What has separated Kuntz is his willingness to use them.

"All the resources are there," Kaufman said. "But it's the athlete who has to demand them."

That mindset — ownership over one's development — is something RINK places a premium on, particularly as players move through the program. By the time athletes reach U18 Prep, the expectation is not just performance, but maturity.

"I never really thought about sleep the way I do now," the U18 Prep team captain said. "Getting to bed at the same time every night changed how I felt every day."

Smith describes the Winnipeg product as someone he actively seeks input from — not just about his own game, but about the team as a whole. That awareness, uncommon for a player his age, helped lay the foundation for leadership long before a letter was stitched onto his jersey.

When the time came to name a captain, the decision was straightforward; the vote was nearly unanimous. Both players and coaches saw the same thing: consistency, accountability, and a willingness to lead by example. But leadership, in Kuntz's case, wasn't performative. It showed itself in moments that mattered.



During a difficult stretch earlier this season, when results weren't going the team's way, the right-shooting blueliner called a players-only meeting. It wasn't prompted by the coaching staff. It came from within.

"That's not easy for a 17-year-old," Smith said. "But he recognized that the group needed accountability from itself. That's real leadership."

Those moments — unseen from the outside — are often the clearest indicators of growth. They also reinforce the larger lesson behind Kuntz's story: development is rarely linear, and it's never instant. Smith is candid about the challenges families face when entering an elite environment like RINK.

"We want things fast," he said. "Quick results, quick fixes. But real development doesn't work that way."

At RINK, the expectation is that meaningful progress takes two to three years. The transition — balancing travel, academics, training, and competition — can be demanding. Without patience, it's easy to leave before the foundation has a chance to settle.

Kuntz stayed. He trusted the process. His family trusted it too. And over time, the return became evident — not just in his on-ice performance, but in his leadership, maturity, and understanding of what it means to be a student-athlete. And along the way he was selected in the sixth round of the WHL Prospects Draft to the Saskatoon Blades.

Last season, as a 15-turning-16-year-old player for the U17 Prep team, Kuntz had three goals, 34 points and 58 penalty minutes as a defenceman operating at over a point-per-game rate. The year before was nothing different. So far this season, he has eight goals, 27 points and 86 penalty minutes in 33 outings.

Smith refers to Kuntz as a "classic case" of the model working as intended. Not because everything came easily, but because nothing was rushed. That message resonates beyond one player.

Kuntz's path offers a clear example of what long-term development looks like when patience meets structure. It's a reminder that the biggest gains often happen quietly, year over year, long before they're obvious to outsiders. Today, Kuntz wears the captain's 'C' for RINK U18 Prep. But the letter matters far less than the journey that earned it. And at RINK, that's the main point.

"Nothing's going to happen right away," Kuntz said. It's a journey that takes time; you just have to be patient and trust the process."



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HOCKEYBALL



GROWING WOMEN'S HOCKEY

BY JOHNSTON HALL
Photos courtesy of Hockeyball

HOCKEY IS FACING A MAJOR CHALLENGE, BUT THE FOUNDERS OF HOCKEYBALL SEE IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY. IN FACT, THIS IS HOCKEYBALL'S COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF THE GAME.



As cost barriers continue to rise in traditional ice hockey, we're all witnessing a critical moment for the sport we love.

Programs like NHL First STRIDE, First Shift, and Grow the Game are doing tremendous work to address these challenges, and we applaud their efforts wholeheartedly.

Hockeyball's Mission is to make the game accessible for every girl.

"At Hockeyball, we've positioned ourselves to grow female participation by teaching the fundamentals, joy, and ethos of our beautiful Canadian game through schools, community centers, and partnerships with leading hockey instructors and minor hockey organizations," said Hockeyball's Greg Beaudin.

IT STARTS WITH A STICK AND BALL.

When equipment is properly fitted, correctly sized, and lightweight, every athlete—with a strong emphasis on equity and diversity—can begin their hockey journey with confidence. Through a Physical Literacy framework, young players develop agile movement, passing, shooting, playmaking, and scoring skills that translate directly to on-ice success while building the friendship and fun that are essential to keeping girls in the game.

CHAMPIONS LEADING THE WAY

Our commitment to women's hockey is strengthened through partnerships with some of the game's greatest ambassadors:

HAYLEY WICKENHEISER - WICKFEST

Since the very first Wickfest in 2010, we've worked alongside Hayley to bring Hockeyball to tens of thousands of aspiring young hockey players.

"Wickest provides thousands of female hockey players with a tournament, a conference, nutrition counseling, sports psychology and social events," Beaudin explained. "So, at Hayley's f irst Wickfest 16 years ago, back when it was called floorball, we built a mini-rink for play.

"Then, about three years ago, our role transitioned to supporting the Vancouver Canucks at Wickfest. Our crew, our coaches all wear Junior Canucks Floor Hockey jerseys. We're there to support the Junior Canucks Floor Hockey program and to support Wickfest."



GREG BEAUDIN, MEGHAN AGOSTA AND DAVE BEAUDIN



HAYLEY WICKENHEISER AT WICKFEST



TATIANA RAFTER (RIGHT) WITH CAITLIN MCDONALD

Now in its second decade, this iconic tournament continues to inspire the next generation.

MEGHAN AGOSTA - VPD D.R.E.A.M. HOCKEYBALL CLASSIC

Building on the Junior Canucks Floor Hockey schools' program, three-time Olympic Gold Medalist and 2010 Vancouver Olympics MVP Constable Meghan Agosta launched the VPD D.R.E.A.M. Hockeyball Classic.

"Meghan, who is also a member of the Vancouver Canucks Alumni, applied for a grant from the Police Foundation to run youth hockey ball events," Beaudin said. "So, last year we had our inaugural VPD D.R.E.A.M. Hockey Ball Classic in partnership with the Vancouver Canucks.

Last year, 24 schools—both girls and boys—took to outdoor hockeyball rinks at Jack Poole Plaza, with breathtaking views of the Vancouver skyline and North Shore mountains as their backdrop.

CURRENT STARS ON THE RISE

Team Canada player Jenn Gardiner and PWHL athlete Micah Zandee-Hart brought Hockeyball to life at Junior Canucks Hockey School this past summer, demonstrating how the game bridges grassroots development with elite performance.

TATIANA RAFTER - THE MANITOBA PLAN

Our expansion into Manitoba represents our continued commitment to reaching communities across Canada, ensuring girls everywhere have access to quality hockey programming.

FROM HOTELS TO HOME ICE

Our journey began in 2010 when we built the first floorball rink at Wickfest in Coquitlam, BC, providing participants with fun play opportunities between games and at the host hotel.

Today, our work has evolved to support initiatives like the Vancouver Canucks' presence at North Surrey Sport and Ice Plex. The goal remains constant: provide players, parents and siblings with safe, fun floor hockey experiences—from team warmups to epic family battles. Most importantly, we give the youngest siblings their first, soft introduction to playing hockey, not just cheering from the stands.

BUILDING TOMORROW'S GAME TODAY

Every stick. Every ball. Every girl who picks them up represents our commitment to growing women's hockey from the ground up. Because when we remove barriers and create joyful, accessible entry points to the game, we're not just teaching hockey skills—we're building the foundation for the next generation of players, leaders and champions.

This is how we grow the game.

For anyone interested in how the Elite women play the sport of Floorball/Hockeyball, we suggest they follow this link to see the game in action: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk1-zb5j_1I



HOCKEYBALL

GAME CHANGER

hockeyball.com



COACH GUSHUE ALONG WITH ASSISTANT COACH BEN HACKL (LEFT) AND FORMER PLAYER BRENT POLLARD (RIGHT).

"PRETTY COOL TO GO FULL CIRCLE."

— JAKE GUSHUE ON RETURNING TO DRYDEN AS HEAD COACH AFTER WINNING THERE AS A PLAYER.

FULL CIRCLE
IN A NORTHERN TOWN

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Kerri-Ann Kanceruk

FROM CHAMPIONSHIP DEFENCEMAN TO ARCHITECT OF A FIRST-PLACE POWERHOUSE, JAKE GUSHUE IS CHASING AN SIJHL TITLE IN DRYDEN — WHILE QUIETLY REBUILDING THE NEXT ONE. IN DRYDEN THIS SEASON, HOCKEY FANS ARE LIVING THE ICE DOGS' FROZEN DREAMS.

On winter nights in Dryden, Ontario, the cold doesn't just settle — it sharpens. It creeps across Wabigoon Lake and rattles the arena doors. In the bitter cold, fans flock to the rink like moths to a porch light.

Inside, the Dryden GM Ice Dogs skate beneath championship banners and expectation, chasing another Superior International Junior Hockey League title for a town that measures winters by wins.

Behind the bench stands Jake Gushue, calm but committed, watching every shift with the intensity of someone who has lived every role inside that building.

That's because he has.

Years ago, he arrived as a rugged young defenceman from Maple Ridge, B.C., chasing a Junior A opportunity he barely understood geographically.

Today, he is the head coach and general manager of the SIJHL's first-place team — a championship contender built on discipline, character and a community's unshakeable belief in its hockey club.

"It's pretty cool to go full circle," he said, smiling.

Hockey loves stories about players who come home. Dryden has something better: a coach who never truly left.

FROM UNKNOWN KID TO CHAMPION

Gushue's path to Dryden began with a leap of faith. After two seasons of Junior B hockey in British Columbia, he wanted more. When Red Lake — then the English River Miners — called with a Junior A opportunity, he packed his bags without even knowing where the town was.

He flew to Winnipeg, was picked up by team staff, and only then opened a map to understand just how far north he had traveled. It didn't matter. He had his chance.

A stay-at-home defenceman known more for grit than flash, Gushue filled a role teams covet during playoff runs: tough, steady and reliable. After one season he was traded to Dryden, joining a loaded roster that stormed through the league en route to a championship — the first of back-to-back titles for the Ice Dogs.

It was, in many ways, the template for what he would eventually try to recreate.

COMING BACK DIFFERENT

Years later, after returning west to attend school and begin coaching, the opportunity arose to come back to Dryden as an assistant. He didn't hesitate. Familiar billets, staff and community members welcomed him as if he had never left.

He moved up quickly — assistant coach, assistant GM, then suddenly head coach when a leadership change opened the position. He had originally planned to remain an assistant, but the chance to lead the program he loved was impossible to pass up.

He wasn't stepping into an unknown job. He was inheriting a responsibility.

After all, the people who run the Dryden GM Ice Dogs expect to win.

The team is, in a sense, the heartbeat of the town, a Junior A club regarded with major-league intensity. Players gain instant recognition; fans debate tactics in grocery store aisles; billets and volunteers support the club like extended family.

And Gushue embraces it.

"Pressure," he said, "is proof that people care."

BUILDING A CONTENDER

Last season's Dryden team dazzled offensively, winning high-scoring games with speed and skill. This year's version is something else entirely — structured, balanced, relentless. The Ice Dogs roll four lines, boast eight dependable defencemen, and absorb injuries without losing identity.

Depth is their greatest weapon.

Equally important is discipline off the ice. Meetings start early — not on time, but early. Community involvement is mandatory. Leadership is shared.

Captain Elias Eisenbarth sets the tone, a three-year veteran who polices standards as fiercely as he produces points. He checks on teammates, enforces curfews and ensures nobody drifts from the team's culture.

For Gushue, culture is everything.

The Ice Dogs' roster also includes a strong Manitoba presence — players the coach values for their work ethic and grounded personalities. For a small-market club, character matters as much as talent. Players must adapt to billet life, long bus rides, and the constant scrutiny of a hockey-obsessed community.

Dryden isn't for everyone. It's for those who want to matter.

HAIL MANITOBA

Not surprisingly, the Ice Dogs' identity is reflected clearly in the five Manitobans who have become essential pieces of Dryden's first-place puzzle — a cross-section of skill, grit, and character that Gushue believes defines the team's culture as much as any system.

According to the coach, Pembina Valley Hawks product Ryder Wolfe from Carman might be the most noticeable sparkplug. Undersized but relentless, the 5-foot-6 forward plays a game far bigger than his frame, arriving first on pucks, throwing hits to shift momentum, and crashing the net without hesitation. He is, as Gushue puts it, the kind of workhorse who "does all the little things right," a player capable of changing the emotional temperature of a game in a single shift.

Kelby Diehl from Glenboro and Regan Anderson from Souris form the conscience of the forward group — a checking-line tandem trusted to neutralize opposing stars. Diehl's voice on the bench and fearless penalty-killing anchor the team defensively, while Anderson mirrors that tenacity shift after shift. Together, they embody the



REGAN ANDERSON, SOURIS

RYDER WOLFE, CARMAN

KELBY DIEHL, GLENBORO

Ice Dogs' commitment to structure and sacrifice.

On the back end, Altona's Cohen Pilkington provides steady reliability. A physical shutdown defenceman with an understated offensive touch, he is the player sent over the boards when protecting a late lead, matching opponents' physicality while making smart, composed plays under pressure.

Then there is Winkler's Haiden Friesen, the skilled finisher whose season has mirrored the team's evolution. After an explosive start, he refined the defensive and physical aspects of his game, emerging as a more complete player capable of contributing in every situation.

All five share a reputation that extends beyond the rink. They are community-minded, quick to volunteer, and deeply integrated into Dryden's fabric — exactly the type of players Gushue seeks when building a roster designed to win and to represent the town with pride.

RECRUITING THE NEXT WAVE

It goes without saying that success in junior hockey carries a hidden cost: roster turnover. Every year, aging players move on to college, university, or professional opportunities, leaving holes that must be filled immediately.

Dryden will lose seven 20-year-olds next season — many of them stars.

Gushue's recruiting list is long: roughly nine forwards, multiple defencemen, and at least one goaltender. He will scour Western Canada, leaning heavily on Manitoba and Saskatchewan pipelines that have served the club well, while also exploring new territory in Ontario.

His pitch is straightforward.

"This is an opportunity," he said. "If you're a junior-aged Manitoba player and you're looking for a shot, this is a great place to play.

"In Dryden, reputations don't guarantee ice time, performance does" Gushue added. "A 16-year-old prospect can climb the lineup quickly; a veteran can lose minutes just as fast."

It's a meritocracy — one that appeals to true competitors. Some players shy away from that reality. Others chase it.

Those who embrace it will thrive.

WHY DRYDEN WORKS

For recruits arriving from cities like Winnipeg or Vancouver, Dryden can feel remote. Gushue frames it differently.

It's a hockey city disguised as a small town. "It's a small Toronto," he said. "And the Ice Dogs are the Maple Leafs."

Affordable costs make Junior A accessible. The SIJHL's national sanctioning offers a pathway to the Centennial Cup and beyond.

Most importantly, the community invests deeply in its players. Billets provide homes, businesses donate services, volunteers prepare meals, and fans pack the arena with relentless energy. Players aren't just roster spots; they are adopted sons of the town.

If the organization doesn't have something, someone in Dryden will.

That sense of belonging keeps players returning — even when opportunities closer to home arise.

CHASING ONE MORE BANNER

For now, recruiting boards and future line combinations can wait. Dryden sits atop the SIJHL standings with a legitimate shot at the championship. It's something, he says the community wants, but for the Ice Dogs, "that pressure is a privilege."

For Gushue, winning this title would complete a personal circle — champion player turned champion coach.

But he knows junior hockey's truth: success is temporary. Next season begins the moment this one ends.

That's the job.

Build, compete, rebuild, repeat.

On those frozen nights when the Dryden GM Ice Dogs surge forward and the crowd rises as one, Gushue watches from the bench, exactly where he once dreamed of being. The journey from unknown defenceman to architect of a contender has been long, unpredictable and deeply rooted in the same northern town.

Some careers move forward in straight lines. His came back to where it really got rolling — stronger, wiser and still chasing the same winter prize.

In Dryden, the circle isn't closing. It's widening.



HAIDEN FRIESEN, WINKLER

COHEN PILKINGTON, ALTONA



THE BLAZERS' GRADE 10S. FROM LEFT EMILIE BONIN, LYDIA HILL AND BRANNAGH RAE

BLAZING THE TRAIL

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman, Dave Willson and Tammy Stewner

THE BALMORAL HALL BLAZERS' NEXT WAVE ISN'T COMING — IT'S ALREADY HERE.

Walk into a Balmoral Hall Blazers practice and one thing becomes immediately clear: there is no waiting around for potential to arrive. It's already on the ice.

In a league where many programs lean heavily on graduating seniors or late transfers, Balmoral Hall is doing something different — and doing it confidently. The Blazers are being driven by players still early in their high-school journey, athletes competing with the poise and polish of veterans. They prepare with purpose and carry themselves like the future belongs to them — because it just might.

Ask the coaching staff what separates this group and the answers come quickly: consistency, competitiveness, curiosity. These are players who lean into practice, stay late and chase improvement not because it's expected, but because it's who they are.

Up front, forwards like Lydia Hill and Brannagh Rae set the tempo.

"I met Lydia last year, so I've known her for a season and a half," said assistant coach Chelsea Dinnin. "She's incredibly driven and always ready to put in the work. She's constantly asking what she can do better. Compared to last season, I've seen a big change in all areas of her game. She's super tall and strong for her age, and she wants to get to that D1 level. With the way things are going, she's on the right track.

"She's outgoing, positive, and a great presence in the room, which will prepare her to become a leader."

"Brannagh provides a lot of our energy. She brings 110 percent effort every day, and the consistency is off the charts. She stays out extra to perfect her shot and try new things. She wants to be the best she can be.

"She's striving to reach NCAA Division I, and I could see her becoming one of our leaders. She leads by example and works extremely hard on and off the ice."

On the back end, Emilie Bonin already looks like the modern prototype. A fluid skater with elite vision, she can turn defence into offence in a blink — skating pucks out herself, quarterbacking the power play, and still recovering defensively with ease.

"For being a Grade 10, she's one of the most fluid skaters on our team," said head coach Aaron Kaatz. "She can break out a puck by herself, skate it past four checkers, and quarterback a power play with top scorers. Her shot is powerful, and because of her skating, she can recover and beat forwards back on the backcheck.

"With two more years to develop strength, she's on a path toward U SPORTS or Division I. She's already so strong."

What makes this group especially compelling is that their excellence isn't limited to the rink. In the classroom, they're dependable and engaged, understanding that being a student-athlete means owning both sides of the role. At Balmoral Hall, they embody the BH way — young athletes modeling exactly what the program hopes every player will become.

Perhaps most striking is their perspective. They have big dreams — NCAA hockey, U SPORTS, the PWHL, even representing Canada — but they understand those dreams are built one shift, one class, one season at a time.

If this is what Balmoral Hall looks like at Grade 10, the rest of the league has reason to pay attention.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

17 LYDIA HILL // F // 5'8" // SHOOTS RIGHT // MORDEN, MB



"I was three when I started skating and four when I played for my first hockey team — my brother's team. Hockey's always just been part of my life."

Growing up in Morden, Hill's world was shaped as much by the rink as it was by the land around her. A farm kid at heart, she carries that same work ethic into everything she does — hockey included.

"I live in Morden, but I was born in Miami and played for the Miami Rockets. I played the 2023-24 season with the U15 AAA Pembina Valley Hawks. I chose Balmoral Hall for Grade 9 because there are so many good players here and it's such a good program. The coaches are amazing, and the girls are great."

It's not only the comfortability, Hill also wanted a challenge.

"I started emailing schools because I wanted a higher level. I loved BH right away."

Now in her second season, she knows she made the right choice.

"I came in Grade 9, so this is my second full year. I love being here. It pushes you every day. One day I hope to go to college and in the future play in the PWHL. And then go back to the family farm."

That pull home has never faded.

"My dad has an elk ranch and he also farms fields. When I finish university, the plan is still to go back to the farm. That hasn't changed."

4 EMILIE BONIN // D // 5’9” // SHOOTS LEFT // WINNIPEG, MB



“I started playing hockey when I was four, on my brother’s team in St. Boniface for the Notre Dame Paladins. I played Novice in St. Boniface, then AA with the Railcats. In my U15 year, I got asked to come to BH. This is my first year here. I played at St. Mary’s last year.”

Bonin joined BH this year.

“I really like how welcoming and supportive it is. People want you to succeed in hockey and school.”

Balance defines her approach.

“I try to stay on top of school.”

Her goals are ambitious.

“I want to play university or college hockey and then hopefully end up in the PWHL too.”

Away from the rink, she stays active.

“I play soccer, and I like to hang out with friends. Soccer’s my other sport.”

On the ice, her game speaks loudly — smooth skating, sharp reads, and the confidence to control play from the back end. Off it, she’s quietly building the foundation to take her game wherever it can go.

15 BRANNAGH RAE // F // 5’9” // SHOOTS LEFT // WINNIPEG, MB



“I have three dreams: play NCAA Division I, reach the PWHL, and represent Canada.”

At 15, Rae skates like someone chasing those goals with purpose.

“I started playing at four in the APHA organization. I’ve been at BH since pre-kindergarten, so it feels like home.”

That familiarity breeds confidence.

“The environment and culture are amazing. It’s a great place to develop as a student, player, and person.”

Tall, fast, and driven, she blends skill with an elite motor.

“I love being here because I know I’m being challenged every day. You can’t take shifts off. You don’t want to.”

Despite early success, she stays grounded.

“I know what I want long-term, but right now I’m focused on getting better every day, helping the team, and taking advantage of the opportunities I have here.”

DIFFERENT POSITIONS. DIFFERENT PATHS. ONE SHARED APPROACH.

Each player speaks with clarity about who they are and what it takes to get there. They value hard work, respect structure and understand success is earned.

At Balmoral Hall, they’re learning that excellence isn’t about age — it’s about habits. And judging by the way they skate, study and speak about the game, those habits are already firmly in place.

The future of Balmoral Hall isn’t on the horizon. It’s already blazing a trail.



GABBY ROBBINS SCORES A GOAL FOR TEAM MANITOBA AT THE 2025 NATIONAL ABORIGINAL HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP.

PLAYING THE RIGHT WAY

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by Darryl Gershman, Lucas Rotondo and Nick Lacoste

When Team Manitoba head coach Dale Bear sends Gabby Robbins over the boards, there's already a quiet understanding on the bench. The puck will be protected. The battle will be won. The play will move out of her zone.

She doesn't announce herself with noise or flash. Robbins does it the old way — with body position, timing, and an engine that doesn't quit. Coaches love players like her. Teammates trust them. Opponents feel them all night.

At just 16, Robbins has already carved out a reputation as a complete 200-foot forward, a gritty player who thrives in the dirty areas of the rink and makes everyone around her better. Whether she's killing penalties, creating traffic at the net, or calmly moving the puck to a better option, she plays the game with a maturity well beyond her years.

And this May, when the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships re-convene in Regina, this star with the MFHL U18 AAA's Winnipeg Ice will play a determining role. In fact, her skill, tenacity and quiet leadership qualities will be a contributing factor in Team Manitoba's success.



GABBY ROBBINS WITH TEAM MANITOBA

FINDING HOCKEY AND HERSELF

Robbins' hockey story began early. She was five years old when she first stepped onto the ice, skating out of Dakota Arena in Winnipeg. Like many young Winnipeggers, she skated wherever ice was available.

After her Timbits years, at age seven, Robbins spent a season playing on a boys team — a formative experience that helped shape her competitive edge. Soon after, she transitioned into girls' hockey, where her development accelerated. She worked her way through A1, then earned a spot with the St. Vital Victorias at the AA level.

Of course, she didn't just make the team — she became a difference-maker.

Robbins spent four seasons with the Victorias, three of which resulted in city championships. One season was lost to COVID, but the progress never stopped. By the end of her U15 career, she was named team MVP, recognition that reflected not just her production, but her reliability and consistency in every situation

POWER FORWARD IDENTITY

Ask Robbins to describe her game and she doesn't hesitate.

"I'm a hardworking forechecker," she said. "I'm good in the defensive zone. I like blocking shots, playing on the penalty kill. I'm more of a playmaker, but I can score too."

It's an honest assessment — and an accurate one.

Robbins thrives in traffic. She plays net-front on the power play, absorbs contact, and keeps her stick available for tips and rebounds. She protects the puck exceptionally well along the walls and understands when to delay, when to drive, and when to distribute.

"She's hard to push off the puck," said Winnipeg Ice head coach Eugene Kaminsky. "When she gets it, you might as well not even try. That's a unique skill at this level."

Kaminsky points to Robbins' ability to make plays under pressure — not just forcing action but reading the ice and creating opportunities for her linemates.

"She knows how to put the puck in spots," he said. "She wins battles, moves it low to high, makes smart decisions. She's an all-around player."

It's that versatility that has made Robbins a fixture on both special teams for the Ice, one of the most dominant programs in the league. Through the regular season, the Ice have lost just twice — once in a shootout — and Robbins has been right in the middle of it all

A DEEPER CONNECTION

Robbins' journey took on deeper meaning when she had the opportunity to compete at the 2025 NAHC in Kamloops, representing both Manitoba and her First Nations heritage. It was a bonus when she and her teammates brought home the gold medal.

A member of O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nation (Crane River), Robbins describes the experience as transformative, as a player and as a person.

"It was a really good opportunity to meet and play with girls I normally would play against," she said. "But it was also a way to represent my home community and honour my Nana."

Her grandmother, who is from Crane River, is the link through which Robbins connects to her heritage. While she had always been aware of her roots, competing at NAHC sparked a deeper curiosity and pride.

"After NAHC, I definitely became more interested in



GABBY WITH THE WINNIPEG ICE IN A GAME AGAINST WEYBURN



GABBY IN HER FAVOURITE PLACE. IN FRONT OF THE NET.

learning the history of my Nana and my family," she said. "Just learning where everything comes from."

That sense of purpose showed on the ice. Robbins played with the same intensity and intelligence that defines her club game, while absorbing the cultural significance of the tournament and the connections it fosters

Bear describes Robbins as the type of player every coach hopes to have.

"She's a complete competitor," Bear said. "You tell her what you need, and she executes. She plays all aspects of the game well."

Bear also highlighted Robbins' leadership style: quiet, consistent, and example-driven.

"She doesn't say much, but she leads by example. She's always positive, always supportive. She's the definition of a lead-by-example player."

WINNING AND GROWING

Now in her second season with the Winnipeg Ice at the U18 AAA level, Robbins continues to evolve. She's trusted in every situation, used against top competition, and leaned on when games tighten. And her growth hasn't gone unnoticed beyond the rink.

Still in Grade 11, Robbins has already committed to the University of Windsor, where she plans on studying engineering — a demanding academic path that reflects her strength in mathematics and discipline away from the ice.

She's already completed Grade 12 pre-calculus and plans to graduate early, finishing her high school coursework by the middle of next season.

"I'm good in school," she said. "Math is my thing."

Kaminsky notes how rare it is to see players commit to university so early.

"She's one of only a few players at this age to commit already," he says. "And she's only going to get better."

That's the scary part... for opponents, at least.



GABBY IN A BATTLE FOR THE PUCK AGAINST WEYBURN

Robbins, who had six goals and 12 points in the Ice's first 18 games this season, still has another year of U18 AAA hockey ahead of her, and coaches believe her physicality, puck protection, and decision-making will take another leap before she arrives on campus to play for the Lancers.

BEYOND THE RINK

When she's not at the rink, Robbins' life is grounded in family. She enjoys watching her younger sister - a ringette goaltender - play, spending time at the lake in the summer, and hunting and fishing with her dad — a very Manitoba mix of off-ice passions.

She's soft-spoken, a little shy, but confident in who she is and what she wants.

"She asks good questions," Kaminsky says. "She knows what works for her. She adapts quickly. That confidence is huge."

As for hockey idols, Robbins keeps it simple: Winnipeg Jets sniper Kyle Connor and former Blackhawks' captain, now Jets forward, Jonathan Toews — players known for intelligence, positioning, and doing things the right way.

Fitting choices.

Because in the end, that's what defines Gabby Robbins. She doesn't chase attention. She doesn't cut corners. She plays honest hockey — hard on the puck, smart with decisions, and committed to every shift.

And wherever her game takes her next, one thing is certain: when she hops over the boards, everyone knows exactly what they're getting: A battle won. A play made. And a teammate you want on your side.



THE PERFECT TIME TO JOIN THE BUFFALOES

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman and Art for Athletes



ANOTHER GOAL CELEBRATION. PILOT MOUND HOCKEY ACADEMY IS A GREAT PLACE TO PLAY.

WITH A NEW TEAM ON CAMPUS AND LOTS OF SPOTS TO FILL, PILOT MOUND HOCKEY ACADEMY HAS A PLACE FOR ANY YOUNG HOCKEY PLAYER WILLING TO WORK HARD BOTH ON THE ICE AND IN SCHOOL. AND THE BUFFALOES ARE ESPECIALLY EXCITED ABOUT FINDING YOUNG STUDENT-ATHLETES WHO WANT TO GET BETTER IN EVERY WAY.

In an era when elite hockey pathways can feel crowded, confusing, and increasingly transactional, opportunity has become the rarest commodity of all. For players and families searching for a place where development still matters more than hype — and where ice time, coaching, education, and exposure are not theoretical promises but daily realities — fall 2026 could be a defining moment. At Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, opportunity isn't shrinking. It's opening wide.

"We've got room," said Gordie Tumilson, the Academy's coordinator of player recruitment, plainly and confidently. "And not just a little bit of room."

With the addition of an extra team next season, Pilot Mound Hockey Academy is preparing for one of the most significant intake years in its modern history. As many as 50 to 60 roster spots may be available across multiple age groups, including U15, U17, U18 prep teams, a growing female program, and a newly defined varsity-level stream designed for high-end players who may be looking for a different path.

For the right athlete, at the right time, that kind of access is rare and powerful.

A SCHOOL BUILT AROUND HOCKEY

Unlike many academies that ask players to squeeze school around hockey, Pilot Mound flips the model. Education is not an afterthought, and through the extraordinary efforts of Pilot Mound Collegiate Institute it is fully integrated into the daily life of the Academy.

In fact, Pilot Mound players make up roughly half of the entire student body. Eighty of the school's 160 students are Academy athletes, a reality that fundamentally shapes how education is delivered.

"Our kids aren't trying to fit into a system that wasn't designed for them," Tumilson explained. "The system is designed for them."

Each player follows a custom-designed academic program, built to accommodate travel schedules, game demands, and training loads while still meeting — and often exceeding — provincial standards. Teachers understand the rhythm of the season. Communication between academic staff and coaches is constant. Accountability is shared.

The result is a structure that allows players to pursue elite hockey without sacrificing their future options.

That future, importantly, is not limited by geography.

"Manitoba education opens doors everywhere," Tumilson said. "Our graduates can get into any college or university in North America — and beyond."

For families weighing long-term outcomes, that flexibility matters. Players leave Pilot Mound not just with hockey resumes, but with academic credentials recognized across Canada, the United States, and internationally.



PMHA GRAD AND MEMBER OF CANADA'S BRONZE-MEDAL-WINNING TEAM AT THE 2026 WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP, CARSON CARELS. YOU CAN GET TO TEAM CANADA FROM PILOT MOUND.



CASEY SILVERMAN

GETTING BETTER AT PMHA

Pilot Mound's reputation has never been about being the biggest academy in Canada. Instead, its identity has been built quietly and steadily on something far more durable: results.

"People sometimes forget what this place has produced," Tumilson said. "Carson Carels. Benson Hirst. Bryden Sinclair. And that's just naming a few. These are kids who came here, got better, and moved on to bigger opportunities and the extra daily ice time (every evening) didn't hurt either."

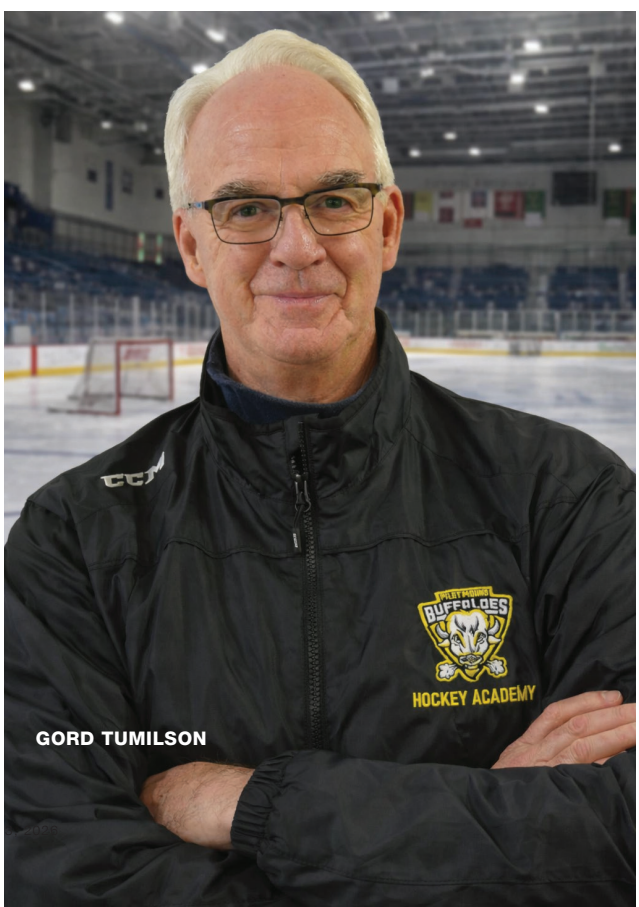
That pattern remains central to the Academy's mission. Players don't come to Pilot Mound to disappear into a depth chart. They come to be developed — and to play.

One of the Academy's advantages heading into 2026 is flexibility. With openings across multiple age groups, the staff is able to evaluate players not just on where they are now, but where they can realistically get to with the right environment.

"We're talking about kids who want to play prep hockey at U18, U17, U15 — male and female," Tumilson explained. "And then there's this newer varsity or AAA-style level that really fits a certain player."

That group might include athletes who were cut from traditional AAA programs, late bloomers who found their stride after setbacks, or motivated high school players who believe they have more to give.

"These are kids who think, 'I've got something to offer,'" Tumilson said. "And they probably do."



GORD TUMILSON

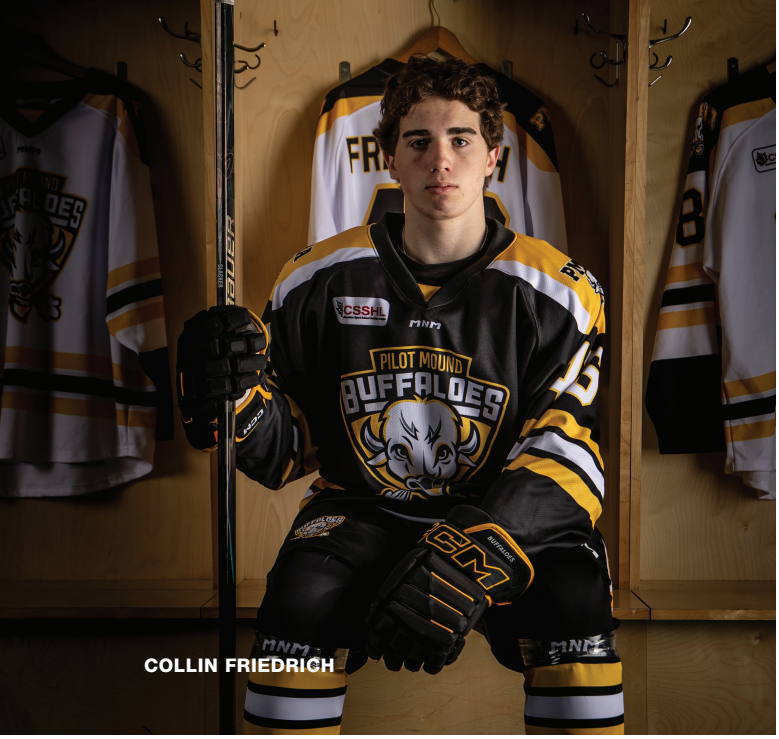
GLOBAL REACH, TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY

Recruitment at Pilot Mound has expanded well beyond Manitoba and Western Canada. The Academy now maintains active European connections thanks to new European scout, Matej Sefcik who has solid relationships in hockey-rich countries such as the Czech Republic and Denmark, while continuing to strengthen relationships with North American family advisors and player representatives.

That global reach helps keep the program competitive. But it hasn't changed the culture. Casey Silverman, who hails from Hellerup, Denmark, and is in his second year with the Buffaloes, found exactly what he was after at Pilot Mound.

"My dad is Canadian, so I was looking for something here, something different from back home in Denmark," he told the Buffaloes Podcast. "I wanted a smaller town and a place with dorms. This is a good place to come to. I'm very happy with my decision."

Pilot Mound remains exactly what it has always been: a place where players are known, supported, and challenged every day.



COLLIN FRIEDRICH

"I think the town size scares some people," Tumilson admitted. "And I'm not sure why."

In reality, the small-town setting is one of the Academy's greatest strengths. Players live in what Tumilson confidently calls the best dormitory in Western Canada — a modern, secure residence located steps from the rink, classrooms, and training facilities.

"We're not billeting players," he said. "Everything is right here."

That includes nutrition.

A commercial-sized kitchen, staffed by a full-time chef and cooks, prepares and serves more than 80,000 meals every season. It's a small detail that says a lot about the Academy's priorities: consistency, quality, and care.

"When you've got teenagers training every day, that matters," Tumilson said with a smile.

THE BEST FACILITIES

While Pilot Mound may be small in population, its infrastructure rivals that of far larger centres.

Fitness facilities, on-ice training resources, shooting programs, and recovery spaces are fully integrated into the daily schedule. Medical and athletic therapy support is close at hand, with emergency services minutes away. Players are closely connected to concussion protocols, injury management systems, and league-mandated safeguards.

"In a big city, you might actually wait longer," Tumilson noted. "Here, resources are immediate."

That efficiency translates directly into development. With fewer distractions and less wasted time, players simply spend more hours doing the work that makes them better.

"You're never going to get a better opportunity as a teenage hockey player to improve than you will here," Tumilson said.

A FEMALE PROGRAM THAT DELIVERS

One of Pilot Mound's proudest achievements — and one that Tumilson believes deserves more attention — is its success on the female side.

"We place every single one of our girls," he said. "Every single one."

Graduating players consistently move on to Canadian and American college programs, a result Tumilson attributes to strong competition, extensive schedules, and a culture that pushes athletes every day.

"They're playing against really good teams," he explained. "They're learning every night."

And they are extremely competitive in an extremely competitive CSSHL.

Last year Collin Friedrich had a solid season with the U17 Male Prep Team scoring 51 points in 42 games. Then, he and Silverman, helped the U17 Buffaloes win a CSSHL championship.

Interestingly, Friedrich came to Pilot Mound by way of Tampa, Fla.

"Two years ago, the U17s went to Minnesota for a tournament, and I was there with my Tampa team," Friedrich shared. "I played pretty well and got noticed by Pilot Mound and then I practiced with them after the tournament and it went from there.

"Last year's group was pretty special, and a lot of people came together, and we had a good playoff run. I think our work ethic and the overall atmosphere within the team was very good and we were able to have a good run in the playoffs."

WHY 2026 MATTERS

Timing matters in hockey. So does context.

The fall of 2026 represents a moment when Pilot Mound Hockey Academy is growing, adapting, and actively seeking players who want more than a logo or a sales pitch. It's a year when roster availability aligns with proven development, when academic structure aligns with athletic ambition, and when opportunity aligns with preparation.

"This isn't about filling spots," Tumilson said. "It's about finding kids who want to work, who want to get better, and who want something real."

Come fall 2026, the door will be open.


THE PMHA DORMS



SMALL TOWN CAPTAIN, GLOBAL STAGE

Hayley McDonald carried more than just her stick onto the ice in mid-January. The East St. Paul product held the responsibility of captaining Team Canada on one of the sport's biggest international stages — a moment she describes as both surreal and unforgettable.

Playing in front of a sold-out crowd at the IIHF U18 Women's World Championship in Sydney, N.S., McDonald embraced the opportunity to lead her country, her province and her community.

"I was very honoured that my teammates and coaching staff trusted me with that responsibility," she said. "That accountability meant everything."

Canada ultimately fell 2-0 to the United States in the gold medal game — a result that still lingers.



HAYLEY MCDONALD AT A TEAM CANADA PRACTICE



HAYLEY MCDONALD IN GAME ACTION AT THE U18 WOMEN'S WORLDS

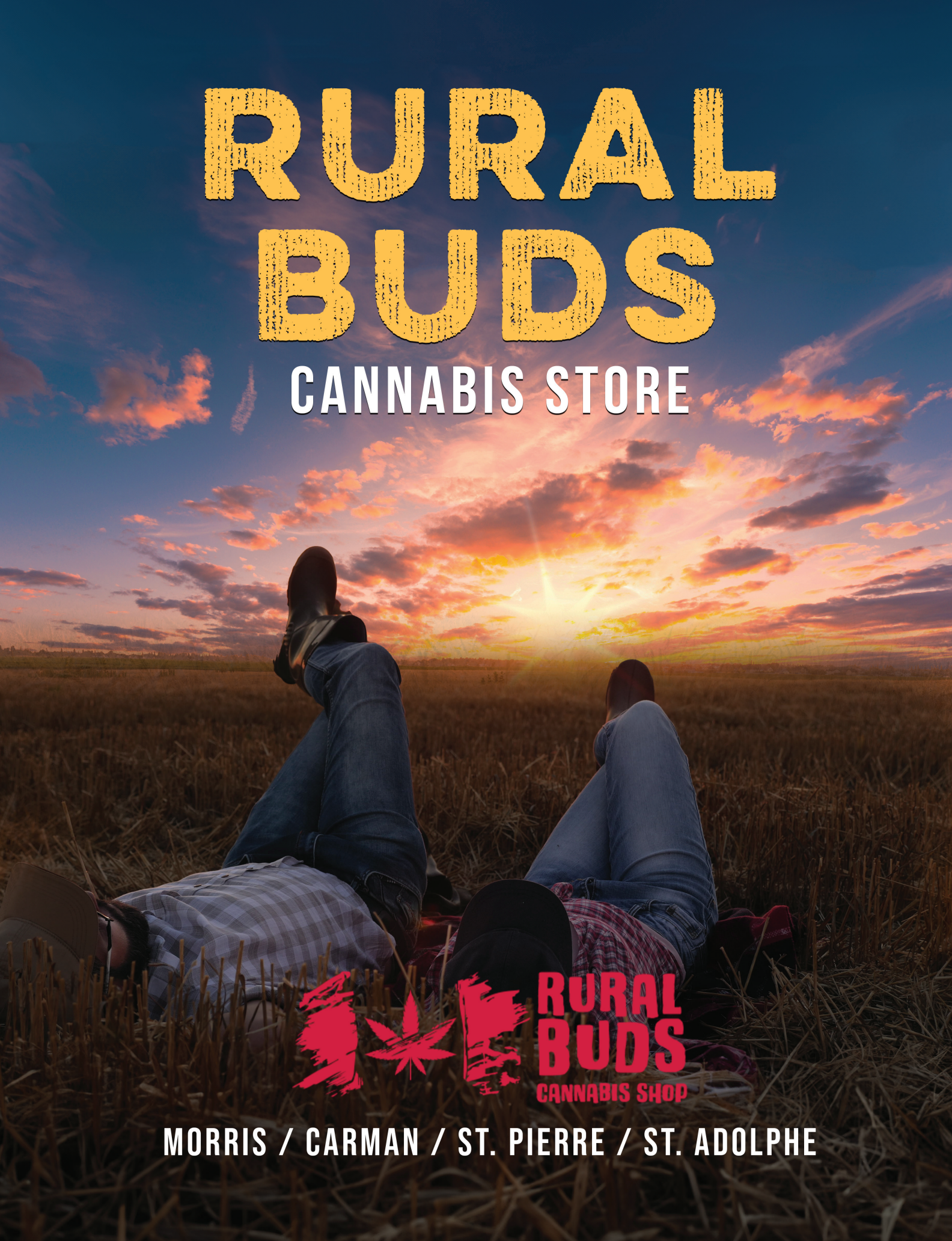
"It was heartbreaking," McDonald admitted. "You want that gold medal so badly. We gave it everything we had, and it was such a fun game to play. Kudos to their goalie, we just couldn't get anything past her. But coming home with silver still means something."

Beyond the medal, the experience reinforced McDonald's growth as both a player and a leader. Learning to remain calm in high-pressure moments while blocking out external noise became essential lessons she will carry forward.

"The only thing that matters is you and your team," she said. "Just staying calm, staying together, and persevering through everything."

From East St. Paul Community Centre to captaining Team Canada on the world stage, McDonald has already reached heights many only dream of. And with Ohio State University — and her Olympic aspirations — on the horizon, McDonald's journey is only just beginning.

Photos courtesy of Hayley McDonald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Business is rock-solid for Western Marble, Granite & Tile, which laid its foundation in 1977 as a small family-run business. Since 2013, the company has flourished under new owners, who are proud to maintain its personal approach to doing business. With its continuous growth, comes a new showroom and indoor warehouse. This new showroom allows customers to shop for materials in comfort with the use of state-of the-art technology to see their project come to life! The production facility has expanded, allowing its industry-leading turnaround time and quality to increase and improve even more. Offering one of the largest showrooms in Manitoba, the space is stacked with display racks. Stone samples are available for customers to sign out and take home. That way, clients can see first-hand how the selection will look under their own lighting and in their own space. For added convenience, hundreds of tile sample boards can also be signed out and returned. The showroom features a computer station where customers can browse an extensive inventory and receive a 3-D rendering of their project. As well, customers can browse through thousands of in-stock granite slabs, which are all entirely unique in flow, grain and colour.

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