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GAME ON



STU IN BLUE:

THE SKINNY ON SKINNER

A ROYAL FAMILY AFFAIR:

THE MINUKS BEGIN A NEW ERA IN RIVER EAST

MANITOBA'S MASTER MENTOR:

CELEBRATING HOCKEY MANITOBA'S BOB CALDWELL

JOEL EDMUNDSON:

GAME ON'S DEFENCEMAN OF THE YEAR

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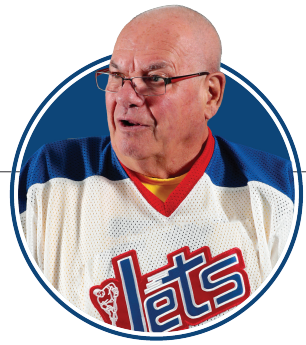

THE BOYS ARE BACK

The 2026-27 National Hockey League season is upon us and that means the boys are back at Canada Life Centre. To commemorate the start of a brand-new season of Winnipeg Jets hockey, Joe Daley's Sports and Framing has a spectacular keepsake you'll definitely want to hang in your home.

"Five Pucks," autographed by the stars of the Jets – 30-plus goal scorers Mark Scheifele, Gabriel Vilardi and Kyle Connor; captain Adam Lowry and Olympic medalist Josh Morrissey – with photographs of each player in action.

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GAME ON MAGAZINE'S 2026
DEFENCEMAN OF THE YEAR

JOEL EDMUNDSON

Photos by Rusty Barton and James Carey Lauder

A veteran presence, Stanley Cup champion and one of the NHL's most dependable defensive defencemen, Brandon's Joel Edmundson put together one of the most productive seasons of his career in 2025-26.

In his second season with the Los Angeles Kings, Edmundson suited up for all 82 games for the first time in his NHL career, recording two goals and a career-high 21 assists and 23 points. The 6-foot-5 blueliner finished the season with a +14 rating while averaging more than 18 minutes of ice time per game, continuing to provide the size, stability and defensive presence that have become hallmarks of his game.

Paired regularly with the offensively gifted Brandt Clarke, Edmundson helped form one of Los Angeles' most consistent defensive pairings. His contributions extended well beyond the scoresheet, as the Westman product recorded 111 blocked shots and 97 hits while logging significant minutes on the penalty kill. Even while battling through an injury during the second half of the season, Edmundson remained in the lineup and played every game for the Kings.

It was another impressive chapter in a career that has now stretched beyond 680 NHL games. Selected by St. Louis in the second round of the 2011 NHL Draft, Edmundson has established himself as a trusted presence everywhere he has played, highlighted by a Stanley Cup championship with the Blues in 2019. Stops in Carolina, Montreal, Washington and Toronto eventually led him to Los Angeles, where the Manitoban has continued to prove his value as a steady, physical veteran.

More than a decade after breaking into the NHL, Edmundson continues to represent his hometown and province on hockey's biggest stage. His durability, consistency and career-best offensive production made 2025-26 another season to remember for the Brandon-born blueliner.

Game On Magazine is proud to name Joel Edmundson its 2025-26 Defenceman of the Year. Congratulations, Joel, from the editorial board of *Game On Magazine.*

DEFENCEMAN



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OF THE YEAR



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OCTOBER 2026
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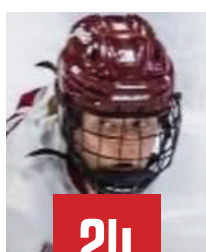

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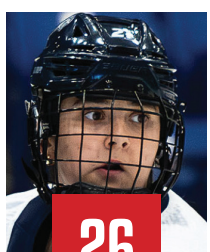

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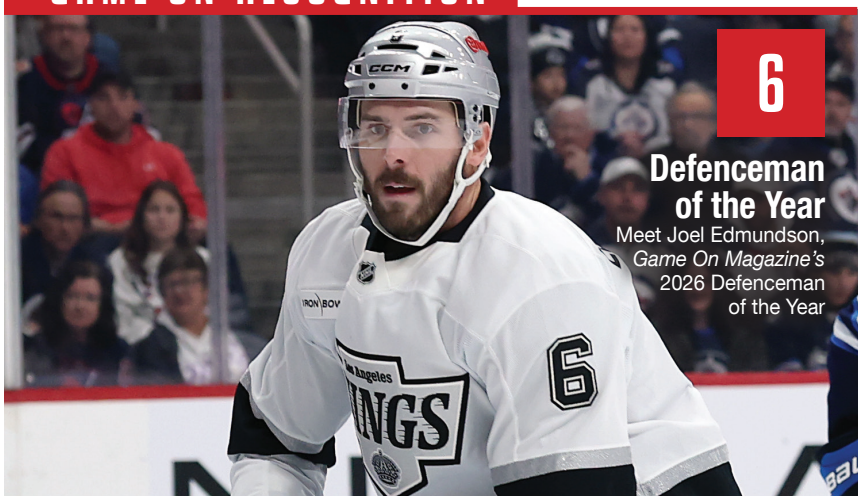

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Defenceman of the Year

Meet Joel Edmundson, *Game On Magazine's* 2026 Defenceman of the Year

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Get to know the new face behind the mask in goal for the Winnipeg Jets this season. Stuart Skinner sits down with *Game On* Editor-in-Chief Carter Brooks to chat about his life both on and off the ice.

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What began as a small holiday tournament has grown into the *Winnipeg Jets Challenge Cup,* bringing nearly 200 teams together each Christmas. More than just hockey, it's a celebration of family, community and the love of the game.

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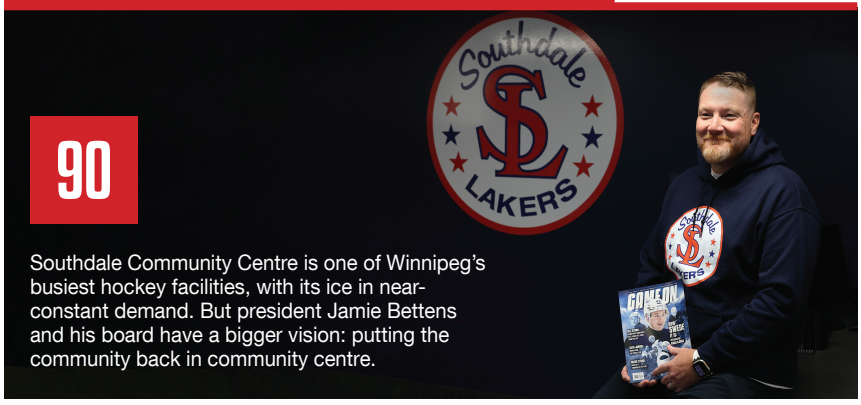
A new six-week *Ice Lab* program is opening the door to goaltending for young players in Winnipeg. But could the initiative spark something bigger, particularly within the city's Filipino community?

COMING HOME 70
After pursuing Junior A hockey away from home, Acoyen Fehr and Haiden Friesen are returning to southern Manitoba to join the Pembina Valley Twisters. With valuable experience behind them, could their homecoming be the spark the team needs?

ALL IN THE FAMILY 74
Twenty-five years after Manny Minuk first wore a River East Royal Knights sweater, the team has become a family affair. With father and son behind the bench and another Minuk now joining the lineup, a new chapter has begun taking shape.

A COACH'S LIFE 86
After more than 50 years in hockey, Bob Caldwell has earned his place in the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame. But for the longtime coach and mentor, there may still be plenty left to learn.

MORE THAN A HOCKEY RINK



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Southdale Community Centre is one of Winnipeg's busiest hockey facilities, with its ice in near-constant demand. But president Jamie Bettens and his board have a bigger vision: putting the community back in community centre.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Carter Brooks

VICE PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER
Scott Taylor

GAME ON
MANITOBA'S HOCKEY COMMUNITY

PRESIDENT
Sean Davis

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHIC EDITOR
James Carey Lauder

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS
Rusty Barton, Darryl Gershman, Merlin Heppner, Kelly Jacobson, Jonathan Kozub/Point Shot Photography, Danny Truong, James Carey Lauder, Rayme Thomson, Ray Peters.

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Joe Daley, Khammy Phanthavong, Dave Willson, Duncan Hasker, Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame, St. Thomas University, Quinnipiac University, the MASRC, Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, Colgate University, Stu Horne, the University of New Hampshire, Carlos Lopez, Ron Cantiveros, Hockeyball, hockey for all centre, Scott Taylor, the Arborg Ice Dawgs, the ACHA, the Thunder Bay North Stars, Manitoba AAA U18, Manny Minuk, the River East Royal Knights, Keith Herschmiller, the Humboldt Broncos, the Winnipeg Wild, Brandon University, Hockey Manitoba, Hockey Canada, the Larocque family, Dylan Asmundson, the RINK, Becky Fleury, Art4Athletes, Ryan Moran and Carson McConnell.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Chelsea McCrimmon, Jeff Leiter, Paul Edmonds and Gordie Tumilson.

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Rusty Barton.

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PRESIDENT
Sean Davis

VICE-PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER
Jay Cumming

VICE-PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING
Kara Di Paolo

DESIGN AND LAYOUT
Sivananthan Kannan

MANAGING EDITOR
Barry Horeczy

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 NEW CHAPTER

For those of you who have been following along with my last few columns, I can happily report that my wedding went off without a hitch. The sun was shining, the drinks were flowing and my beautiful bride even showed up and said yes. My 89-year-old grandfather officiated his 527th wedding, which is a pretty remarkable accomplishment in itself. As Shania Twain would say, "Looks like we made it."

But enough about me. There are plenty of new chapters unfolding across Manitoba's hockey landscape, and this issue of *Game On Magazine* is filled with them.

Take our cover boy, Stuart Skinner, for example. After spending his childhood and much of his NHL career in Edmonton - including two trips to the Stanley Cup Final - the 27-year-old netminder has found himself in Winnipeg, where the familiar chants of "STUUU" have already become a fixture at Canada Life Centre.

It's a new opportunity for Skinner, a new look between the pipes for the Jets and another reminder of how quickly things can change in professional hockey.

Of course, change isn't exclusive to the NHL.

Over in River East, longtime Royal Knights owner Barry Bonni has handed the keys to his Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League franchise to former player Manny Minuk after 45 years at the helm. It's a remarkable story of dedication, family and the passing of the torch, with Minuk's sons now involved in the organization as well.

Unfortunately, the timing of that transition hasn't been ideal. Just as the new season was getting underway, Terry Sawchuk Arena was closed due to structural concerns, leaving the Royal Knights scrambling to find somewhere to play their home games. The closure comes after similar disruptions in recent years, while West Kildonan Community Centre has also lost access to its arena, affecting hundreds of minor hockey players.

Then there's Bonni himself, who recently found himself locked out of his longtime office at Terry Sawchuk after publicly criticizing the situation. Bonni believes the decision was connected to his comments, while the city maintains the restrictions are necessary for safety reasons.

Regardless of the circumstances, it's an unfortunate development for someone who has dedicated more than four decades to keeping junior hockey alive in his community.

Player safety must always come first, but these untimely closures raise some legitimate questions about how Winnipeg maintains its aging recreation facilities. When teams and families are left searching for ice just weeks into a season, something clearly needs a closer look.

And that's what makes another story in this issue particularly interesting. At Southdale Community Centre, president Jamie Bettens and his board are working to make their already-busy facility even more welcoming, accessible and useful to the surrounding community. It's a reminder that these buildings are about much more than the hockey played inside them. And on that same note, west Winnipeg's hockey for all centre will also soon be welcoming in thousands of guests from far and wide for its annual holiday season tournaments.

We are also excited to welcome *Hockey Manitoba* back to the pages of *Game On Magazine*. Through a renewed partnership, readers can expect regular stories highlighting the people, programs and initiatives that help make hockey such an important part of life across our province.

And while some are beginning new chapters, others are closing them. Winnipeg's own Ryan Reaves recently announced his retirement following 16 NHL seasons, a career worth celebrating and one we recognize in this issue's Final Word.

From new beginnings to difficult transitions and well-earned farewells, there's certainly no shortage of stories to tell. Thankfully, that's what we're here for.

CARTER BROOKS,
Editor-in-Chief



Photo by Khammy Phanthavong



DYLAN BAUKNECHT

77

DEFENCEMAN // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'0"

BORN MAY 14, 2005 // WINNIPEG, MB

2026-27 TEAM: ST. BONIFACE RIELS (MMJHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

ST. BONIFACE RIELS (MMJHL)

37
GAMES

2
GOALS

24
POINTS

Introducing Dylan Bauknecht, the new captain of the St. Boniface Riels and one of the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League's most accomplished defencemen.

Entering his fourth season with the Riels, the six-foot, offensively gifted blueliner has earned a reputation for leadership, maturity and outstanding two-way play.

A lifelong Royalwood resident, Bauknecht developed through the St. Boniface Seals, Railcats, Warriors and Winnipeg Bruins before joining the Riels. In 117 MMJHL games heading into this season, Bauknecht has 13 goals and 68 points as a rearguard.

Head coach Jeff Mitchell calls Bauknecht a “Swiss Army knife," because of his versatility and ability to excel in every situation. Away from the rink, Bauknecht is pursuing an undergraduate science degree with ambitions of becoming a dentist.



Photos courtesy of Dave Willson and Duncan Hasker

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Inside Southdale Community Centre



JAYDEN BLACKSMITH

77

FORWARD // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'10" 155 LBS

BORN JULY 11, 2006 // CROSS LAKE, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: CROSS LAKE ISLANDERS (KJHL)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

CROSS LAKE ISLANDERS (KJHL)

24
GAMES

23
GOALS

36
POINTS

After the first week of the 2026-27 Keystone Junior Hockey League season, the league's leading scorer is diminutive Islanders forward Jayden Blacksmith, who scored an eye-popping nine goals in his first two games of the new season. Last year, Blacksmith had 23 goals in 24 games but this year, the numbers are almost unbelievable. Blacksmith, 20, is in his fourth season of Jr. B hockey with his hometown Islanders. In his first 92 games in the KJHL, Blacksmith had 74 goals and 125 points (1.36 ppg) and a whopping 341 penalty minutes. The young man is not only skilled, but tough. He played U15 AAA with the Brandon Wheat Kings and then played two games with the Pilot Mound Buffaloes before returning home to play for the Islanders. A great all-around athlete. Blacksmith also played softball for Team Manitoba at the 2025 Canada Games in Newfoundland.



Photos by Kelly Jacobson

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KJHL

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CROSS LAKE ISLANDERS



TERRY SAWCHUK

1/30

GOALTENDER // CAUGHT LEFT // 5'11"

BORN DECEMBER 28, 1929, // WINNIPEG, MAN

DIED MAY 31, 1970, // NEW YORK, NY

NHL TEAMS: DETROIT RED WINGS, TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS, BOSTON BRUINS, LOS ANGELES KINGS, NEW YORK RANGERS

CAREER NHL STATS

971
GAMES

2.50
GOALS AGAINST AVERAGE

.907
SAVE PERCENTAGE

Terry Sawchuk came out of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Winnipeg Rangers in 1946 and became one of the greatest goaltenders in NHL history. A fearless competitor, Sawchuk played 21 NHL seasons.

Nicknamed "Uke," the legendary netminder captured four Stanley Cups, won four Vezina Trophies and earned the Calder Trophy as NHL Rookie of the Year in 1951.

Despite battling countless injuries, often playing without a mask, Sawchuk established remarkable records. His 103 career shutouts stood as an NHL record for nearly four decades, while his 447 regular-season victories ranked among hockey's greatest achievements.

A quiet intensely competitive athlete, Sawchuk was renowned for his courage, determination and remarkable ability to dominate games. He died tragically in May 1970 at the age of 40 and was inducted posthumously into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1971.

For generations of Manitobans, Sawchuk is not just a hometown hero, but perhaps the greatest goalie of all time.



Photos courtesy Images on Ice/Hockey Hall of Fame

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KEARA PARKER

13

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'7" 145 LBS

BORN JULY 17, 2005 // WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY BOBCATS (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY TOMMIES (NCAA D-1)

36 GAMES

2 GOALS

5 POINTS

Keara Parker, who played for Team Manitoba at 2023 Canada Winter Games and delivered a point-a-game, was a star with Winnipeg's RINK Hockey Academy U18 female team for two seasons before transferring to the RINK Hockey Academy Kelowna for the 2022-23 season. There, she played on a CSSHL championship team. She then accepted a scholarship to play at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minn., where she played 105 games over three seasons and had 11 goals and 24 points. Last spring she entered the NCAA Player Portal and transferred to Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Conn. A two-time WCHA All-Academic Team member and a 2026 Krampede All-American Scholar/Athlete (Majoring in Business Entrepreneurship), Parker is off to a terrific start at Quinnipiac where she had a goal and four points in her first four games.



Photos courtesy St. Thomas University and Quinnipiac University



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CALI LAVALLEE

8

FORWARD // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'8"

BORN APRIL 3, 2009 // WEST ST. PAUL, MB.

2026-27 TEAM: OHA U22 (ONTARIO U22 ELITE LEAGUE)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

WINNIPEG AVROS (MFHL U18 AAA)

35 GAMES

30 GOALS

49 POINTS

Lavallee helped Team Manitoba win gold at the 2025 National Aboriginal Hockey Championship in Kamloops, B.C. and then repeated in 2026 in Regina. “She is one of the most complete players I’ve ever had in the program,” said Team Manitoba head coach Dale Bear. “Some would consider her a power forward but she’s also a playmaker with great vision of the ice. We expect her to be a major contributor to Team Manitoba again this year.” This past season, Lavallee was the fourth leading scorer (tied for second in goals with 30) in the Manitoba Female Hockey League U18 AAA. Her play in both U18 AAA and with Team Manitoba helped her earn a scholarship to play NCAA D-1 (the New England Women’s Hockey Alliance/ NEWHA) for the Sacred Heart University Pioneers in Fairfield, Conn., in 2027-28. “Cali is offensively gifted and her puck skills, speed, and determination get her into scoring areas,” said Avros head coach Ashley van Aggelen. “She’s hard to play against because she’s an incredible competitor who plays with an edge and has a no quit mentality. She is also an incredible teammate and is great for our room.” Lavallee will play for OHA U22 this season in the Ontario U22 Elite League.



Photos by Darryl Gershman and the MASRC

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CASEY SILVERMAN

91

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 6'2"

BORN JANUARY 18, 2008 // HELLERUP, DENMARK.

2026-27 TEAM: RØDOVRE MIGHTY BULLS (DANISH METAL LIGAEN)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

PILOT MOUND BUFFALOES (CSSHL)

30
GAMES

5
GOALS

14
POINTS

Recent Pilot Mound Hockey Academy graduate, Casey Silverman has signed his first professional contract with the Rødovre Mighty Bulls of Denmark's top professional hockey league, the Metal Ligaen. Silverman spent the past two seasons developing his game within the PMHA Buffaloes while representing Denmark internationally. After gaining valuable experience in the Canadian prep hockey system, he now returns home with an opportunity to continue his development at the professional level.

A product of Hellerup, Denmark, Silverman joined PMHA's U17 Prep program for the 2024-25 season and quickly established himself as a dependable two-way forward. During his U17 campaign, he recorded 7 goals and 16 assists for 23 points in 41 CSSHL games, while adding another 11 points in 13 exhibition and tournament contests. He followed that with a strong season at the U18 Prep level in 2025-26. He represented Denmark at the IIHF U18 World Championship, helping the Danish national team secure another season in the tournament's top division.

Photos courtesy of Pilot Mound Hockey Academy

PILOT MOUND BUFFALOES

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TYNAN EWART
From PMHA to the ECHL's Maine Mariners

CARRIGAN UMPHERVILLE
PMHA to the Russian Professional Women's League

CARSON CARELS
From PMHA to the sixth overall selection by the Calgary Flames in the 2026 NHL entry draft

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AVERY PICKERING

21

DEFENDER // SHOOTS RIGHT // 5'10" 165 LBS

BORN MARCH 12, 2006 // ST. ADOLPHE, MANITOBA

2026-27 TEAM: COLGATE UNIVERSITY RAIDERS (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

COLGATE UNIVERSITY RAIDERS NCAA D-1

36
GAMES

3
GOALS

15
POINTS

Both an outstanding student as well as a superb hockey player, Avery Pickering spent three seasons with the Blazers and anchored the team's defence. Not surprisingly she possesses leadership qualities that were nurtured at BH. Now, in recent years, there have been quite a number of female players from Manitoba who have become captains of NCAA D-1 teams. For example, right now, Morgan Smith from East St. Paul, is the captain of the Bemidji State Beavers. This summer, Avery Pickering of St. Adolphe, Man., joined the ranks when she was named captain of the Colgate University Raiders of Hamilton, N.Y. Pickering, a tall, skilled defender is a senior at Colgate pursuing an undergraduate degree in Molecular Biology with a minor in Physics. She has been an academic All-American three times and last year helped Colgate reach the No. 15 ranking in D-1 women's hockey in the season's final poll. A star with the Balmoral Hall Blazers where she was a teammate of Morgan Smith's, Pickering helped Team Canada win the 2023 IIHF U18 Women's World Championship in Ostersund, Sweden and had an assist in the gold-medal game (Canada beat Sweden 10-0).



Photos courtesy of Colgate University

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DANIKA BOTTERILL

21

FORWARD // SHOOTS LEFT // 5'5"

BORN AUGUST 3, 2005 // PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, MB

2026-27 TEAM: UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE WILDCATS (NCAA D-1)

2025-26 SEASON STATS

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE WILDCATS (NCAA D-1)

35
GAMES

12
GOALS

28
POINTS

Perhaps the greatest player ever to suit up for the Central Plains Capitals of the MFHL U18 AAA, Botterill played three seasons with the Caps and was captain of Team Manitoba at the 2023 Canada Games before leaving to play in the Ontario U22 League for the Etobicoke Dolphins. It was there that she lived with her dad's cousin, Hockey Hall of Famer Jennifer Botterill. In the winter of 2023, she earned a spot with Team Canada's U18 women's team and played for Canada Red in the 2023 National Women's Showcase. She was then off to UNH for the 2023-24 season. Botterill, a psychology major at UNH, missed the 2024-25 season with injury and then, last year, she had a breakout campaign, finishing second on the Wildcats in assists and points while playing every game on the schedule.



Photos courtesy Stu Horne/University of New Hampshire

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COULD YOUR ANKLES BE HOLDING YOU BACK?

When we think of mobility in hockey, we often focus on hips, but equally important is the health of the ankles. Tight or weak ankles can affect entire movement trains in the body, from the feet and knees all the way to the hips and back.

I've mentioned before, when one area of our body is underperforming, other areas will pick up the slack. One of the hallmarks of healthy ankles is the ability of the knee to move forward over the ankle. When tightness prevents this movement, the body will compensate; the knees may collapse inward, a low stance may become more upright and so on. In addition to wear and tear, this impacts a player's ability to optimize edge work, accelerate, find balance etc.

So, what can we do? Below is a simple test, as well as four great exercises to stretch and strengthen the ankles.

THE KNEE-TO-WALL TEST

Come to a low lunge facing the wall as pictured below. Pull the front foot back about four to five inches from the wall and bend the knee. Ideally, you'd like your knee to be able to touch the wall at this distance with A.) the heel flat on the ground, B.) the knee pointed forward, and C.) no pain.

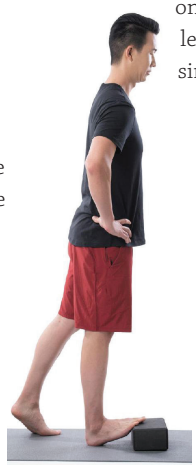
If your knee cannot touch the wall without meeting the above criteria, there is room for improvement when it comes to ankle mobility. To track progress, measure the distance at which the knee *can* touch the wall and use that as your baseline. Re-measure after the following exercises.

LOW LUNGE WITH KNEE OVER ANKLE

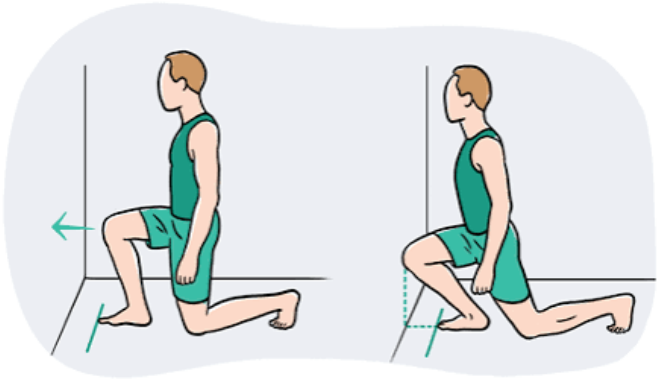
Come to a low lunge as pictured above. You can use blocks, hips or a dowel for balance. Drive your heel towards the earth and lean the knee over the ankle until you feel a nice stretch in the calf. Hold for a few breaths, back out of the pose and then do it again two or three more times. Repeat on both sides.

STANDING CALF STRETCH AT WALL OR ON BLOCK

Stand facing the wall, put your toes against the wall or on a block and let the heel sink towards the ground. Typically, this is performed with the heel resting on the ground; for a deeper sensation you can let the heel hang off the edge of the block, instead of touching the ground. Hold for four or five rounds of breath and switch sides.



KNEE-TO-WALL DORSIFLEXION ANKLE TEST



STANDING BALANCE WITH ANKLE CIRCLES

This exercise is great for strength and flexibility. Come to stand on one leg with the other leg hanging at a right angle in front of you. Pull the toes up towards your shin, point the toes towards the earth, and then circle the ankle in both directions. Perform this movement three or four times, and then repeat on the other side.



DOWNWARD FACING DOG FOR ANKLES

From table top come onto the balls of the feet and send your hips back to downward dog. Shorten your stance by walking your toes a little closer to your hands. Bend your right knee deeply and sink your left heel towards the ground. To deepen sensation, you can place your right toes on the back of your left heel and use them to help firm the left heel down. Hold for several rounds of breath. Repeat on both sides.

Practice these exercises regularly as part of your off-ice training to improve the health of your ankles and enhance performance in the gym and on the ice!

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SILKY MITTS AND SICK HANDS

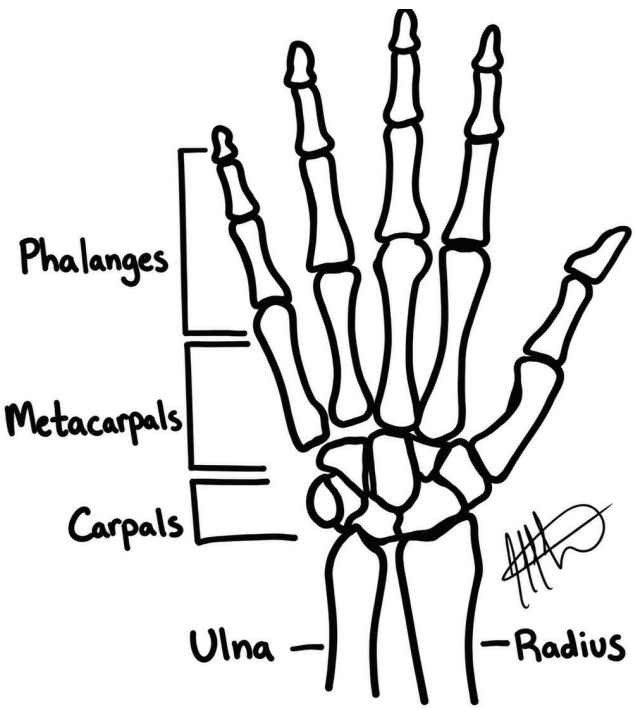
You've heard it before. "He's got silky mitts," or "sick hands!"

You've even likely heard a teammate say, forlornly, "I wish I had hands like Scheifele!"

Make no mistake, if you are around hockey, you have likely heard these terms or even said them to yourself when you're out on the ice.

The amount of puck skills in today's game, at any age, can sometimes leave you speechless. In fact, today's skills are exciting, fast and sometimes seem impossible. Advanced stick technology, hours of practice, enhanced coaching techniques all play a part, but the foundation of what makes all these amazing skills possible is the fascinating and complex structure of the human hand.

Envision a pianist or guitarist ripping through notes and pressing on keys and strings with a speed and rhythm that is difficult to catch with the human eye. That would simply not be possible if not for the anatomic structure and function of the hand. Did you know there are 27 bones (Figure 1), 39 muscles (19 in the hand, and 20 that cross the wrist into the hand) and 27 joints in each hand? Collectively, all these structures allow us to pick up a piece of paper, shoot a hockey puck, or pluck a guitar string.



In addition to the complex anatomy, the versatile function of the hand allows us to perform fine motor skills such as playing a piano or executing gross motor skills such as lifting a heavy bar - skills that require large amounts of strength and stability. In hockey, overpowering your opponent in the faceoff circle requires a lot of strength and stabilization, fast forward a few seconds and you 'toe drag' the defenceman and neatly flip the puck into the top corner past the goalie's glove.

Strength, power, finesse - your hands can do it all. But as you know, it's often easier said than done.

"We didn't have a good game and couldn't capitalize on our opportunities," you'll hear a coach say. "We were gripping our sticks way too hard."

Ahh that's just hockey lingo - a player making an excuse for the loss.

But actually, it's not! There is a biomechanical and physiological explanation for the inability to perform a movement quickly and with a large range of motion when you are 'squeezing your stick too hard'.

This concept is called active insufficiency and is related to muscles that cross more than one joint. In the hand, there are several. Here's a quick trick for you to test this concept: Put your hand out in front of you, with fingers relaxed and open. Now flex and extend your wrist as fast as you can so your whole hand moves up and down. Your hand will move fast, and it feels easy to get a full range of motion. Now, hold your hand out in front of you and make a fist. Now try to flex and extend your wrist as fast as possible. Point proven; active insufficiency.

So, having soft hands and not squeezing your stick so hard when stickhandling or shooting is a very important and critical coaching cue. Keep training, keep having fun and best of luck at your next game. On defence, and in the faceoff circle, keep your hands strong. Around the net, just relax. You'll have those Scheifele-like soft hands in no time.

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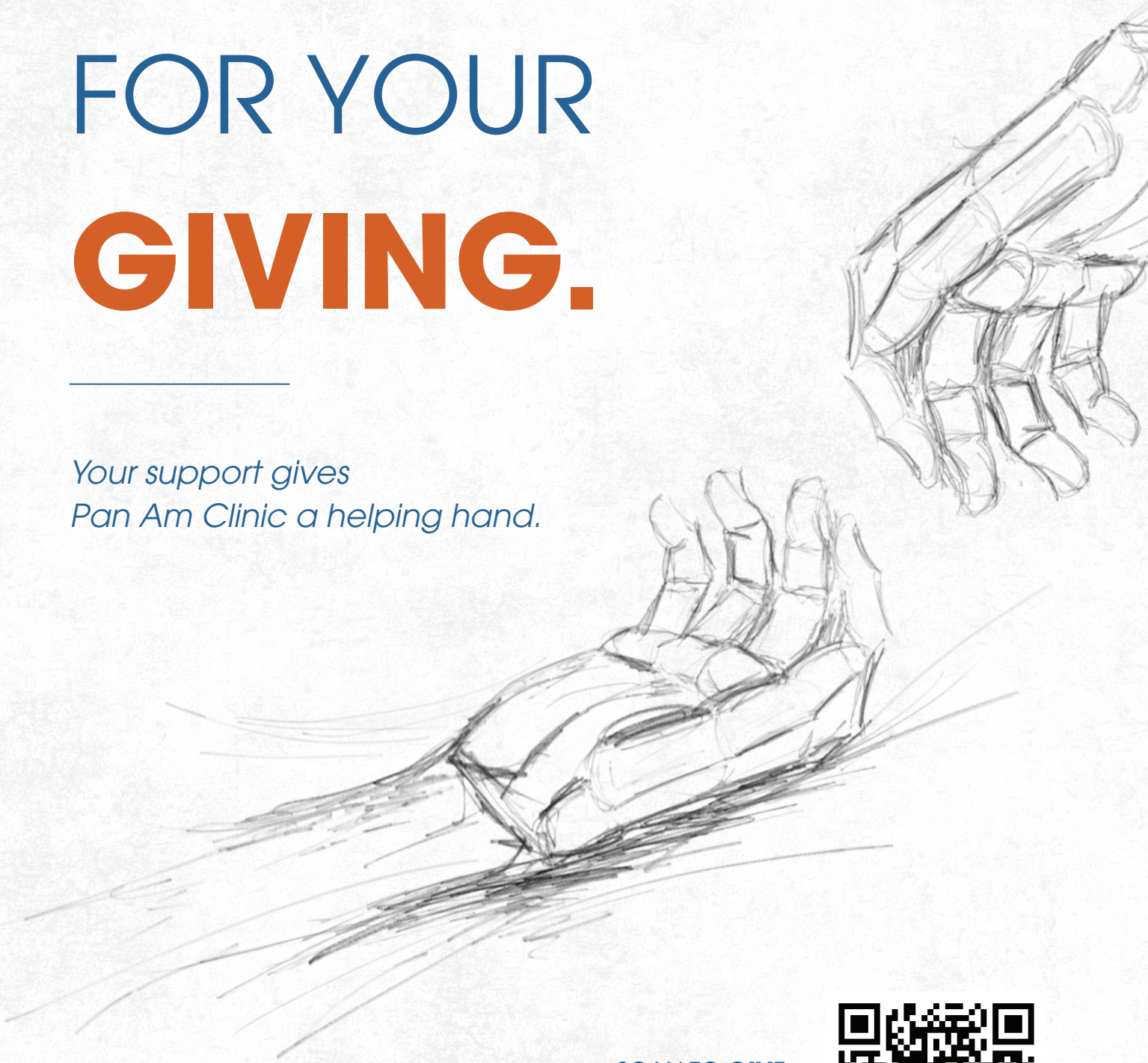

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Photos courtesy of James Carey Lauder, Rusty Barton, Danny Truong, Snap Beauty Photobooth and the Winnipeg Jets

STU IN BLUE

STUART SKINNER has packed a lot of living into 27 years.

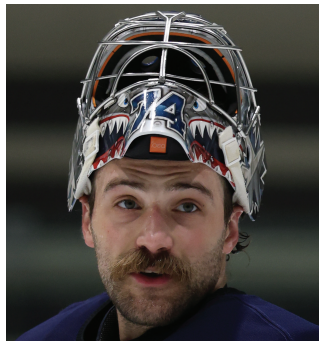
Born and raised in Edmonton, Skinner grew up watching the Oilers, played his minor hockey in the city and was eventually drafted by his hometown team in the third round of the 2017 NHL Draft. He worked his way into the crease, became an NHL starter and helped Edmonton reach back-to-back Stanley Cup Finals in 2024 and 2025.

Then, after spending virtually his entire life in one place, everything began moving at once. Skinner went from Edmonton to Pittsburgh during the 2025-26 season before hitting unrestricted free agency and signing a two-year deal with Winnipeg this summer. Through it all, Skinner has learned to keep moving. He describes life in the NHL as fast-paced, with some moments moving so quickly that there is little time to process them until they are over. His approach has been to block out the noise, handle what needs to be handled and, whenever possible, remember to "smell the roses."

Winnipeg offers something Skinner was actively searching for. He was drawn to the Jets' family-oriented environment, the group already in place and the opportunity to work with goaltending coach Wade Flaherty. Away from the rink, Skinner, his wife and two young children are settling into their new surroundings.

It didn't take long for Winnipeg to embrace him, either. In his first game in Jets colours, chants of "STUUUU" rang through the building following a number of his saves. "Honestly, just the love from the fans, especially at the beginning there before the anthem, that felt fantastic," Skinner said afterward. "The 'Stu' chants around a couple saves, those always feel really good. You can tell how much the fans love it here, how much they love their hockey, how much they love their players."

After the noise, pressure, playoff runs and movement of the past few years, Skinner is looking forward to some stability. His goal in Winnipeg is simple: find consistency, give his team a chance to win and, in his words, "calm the waters down." Skinner caught up with *Game On* editor-in-chief Carter Brooks to discuss growing up an Oiler, two Stanley Cup Final runs, family life, Winnipeg and getting to know his new teammates.



STUART SKINNER

HEIGHT / 6'4"

WEIGHT / 215 POUNDS

AGE / 27 YEARS OLD

BORN / NOVEMBER 1, 1998

FROM / EDMONTON, ALBERTA

POSITION / GOALTENDER

CATCHES / LEFT

DRAFTED / 3RD ROUND, 78TH OVERALL, 2017 NHL DRAFT



STUART SKINNER

1 ON 1

LAST YEAR WAS A WHIRLWIND FOR YOU, GOING FROM EDMONTON TO PITTSBURGH AND NOW WINNIPEG. WHAT HAS THAT EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE, AND HOW HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF SETTLING IN?

"Yeah, this life moves pretty quickly. Even if you don't get traded or moved around, it's pretty fast-paced living for any athlete. You just do your best to kind of smell the roses as you're going through it. There have been some moments where you block it out until it's done, and then you can look back and see what happened. That was kind of the case last year. It was pretty quick-moving, so you block out the emotions and the logistics you've got to do, get it done and move forward. This time, going into free agency, I had a longer summer than usual, so I had a little more time to settle in, sign, get the equipment and focus on that."

YOU WERE BORN IN EDMONTON, RAISED THERE, PLAYED MINOR HOCKEY THERE, WERE DRAFTED BY THE OILERS AND EVENTUALLY PLAYED FOR THEM. WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON THAT EXPERIENCE, DID IT FEEL LIKE YOU WERE LIVING THE DREAM?

"Obviously at the time, it definitely felt like it was the dream. Growing up there, you spend your whole life there, so there's a give and take to it. There's the amazing part of being able to put on the jersey that you watched growing up. There's the other part of the responsibility you've got, and you kind of know what it takes just by watching it as a fan. It was a lot of fun. It had its ups and downs, as any place does, but it was definitely part one of the dream."









YOU WENT TO BACK-TO-BACK STANLEY CUP FINALS. WHAT DID THOSE RUNS TEACH YOU ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL GRIND OF PLAYING IN THOSE BIG MOMENTS?

"It gave me a lot of experience and a lot of lessons on how you react to those big-time situations. Going through different types of adversity, whether that's you, your teammates, not getting a lot of sleep because you're about to play Game 7, learning how to get food down - everyone goes through it in those types of games and moments. Once you go through it once, the following year definitely gets a lot easier. Sometimes you've got to learn how to lose in order to win, and obviously it sucks to say it, but I got that twice. You learn the battle, how hard it is to get there, the grind, how much recovery it takes and the discipline. I could give you a million different lessons I've learned. It changes you as a man too - your character and how you look at life - so I'm very grateful for those."

WHEN FREE AGENCY ARRIVED, WHAT MADE WINNIPEG THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOU?

"There were a few teams involved, and we were looking at an opportunity for me on a growing level - who the goalie coach is and the team. Winnipeg is first class. It's very family-oriented, and that's exactly what I'm looking for. I think those teams normally end up doing the best. You look at the group of guys here, and it's a special group. Obviously, I get to work with Wade now too. I've always wanted to get some advice from him. I was always trying to ask, but wasn't able to get it until now, so it's been good. He's got some incredible insight. He's been doing this for years and has a lot of experience with a lot of good goalies. We've been building really good trust already."

YOU'RE ONLY 27, BUT YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN THROUGH A LOT IN THE NHL. WHAT DO YOU WANT THE NEXT TWO YEARS IN WINNIPEG TO LOOK LIKE?

"I think just levelling myself out and finding some consistency in my game where you know what you're going to get. That's definitely my plan in the next two years. There's been a lot of noise and a lot of stuff going on. Playing in the league for four years, there's been a lot happening, so I just kind of want to calm the waters down and play the best game I can play. I want to give this team a chance to win every time I'm in there, and if I do that, I'll be able to look in the mirror and at least be proud of myself."

WHAT DID YOU KNOW ABOUT WINNIPEG, ITS FANS AND THE PASSION FOR HOCKEY HERE BEFORE BECOMING A JET?

"I know a little bit of the history, when Winnipeg had the team even prior to Atlanta, and obviously how much the fans love hockey here. It's their pride and joy. There's so much love that goes into it. They always care about their team and care about their guys. Getting it back from Atlanta, I would imagine it's just a very cool thing that you get your NHL team back. From playing in this building against Winnipeg, it's always been a hard building to play in because the fans are always cheering, no matter what the score is. They're always cheering for their guys, even if they're down. So I'm just happy to be on that side of things now."

THE SKINNY ON SKINNER

WHO IS THE FUNNIEST JET YOU'VE MET SO FAR?

"Definitely Mario Ferraro. He's got a great character to him. He's always coming in in the morning with a smile on his face, whether it's 7 a.m. or 11 a.m. He's a happy guy around the room."

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE ROAD CITY?

"There are so many good ones. I love going to Dallas. It's a really good spot, we normally stay somewhere with a great spa and it's always nice and warm. Bell Centre is always a favourite — they've got the best hot dogs in the league. MSG is always so much fun to play in too because of all the history."

WHO IS HARDER TO FACE IN PRACTICE: CONNOR MCDAVID OR SIDNEY CROSBY?

"Both are extremely tough. I don't know if there's one that's harder than the other. They have some differences to their games, but they're similar as well. Neither makes it easy on you in practice. I've stopped Connor more to date, but that's just because I played with him longer."





WHO IS THE BEST GOLFER YOU'VE TEED IT UP WITH?

"Here, Scheif is one of the better golfers I've played with. Morrissey is one of the better golfers I've played with. I thought I was a decent golfer - I'm around a five handicap – and then I came here and played one of my first rounds and thought I played pretty well. Then these other guys, Scheif and Samberg and Josh, were all like, 'Oh yeah, we shot in the 60s. It was an average game.' I was like, okay, I'm in a different group of golfers here."

WHO IS THE MOST FAMOUS PERSON IN YOUR PHONE?

"I've got Brett Kissel. I've got Mike Weir. There are a couple golfers. Besides that, it's not like I'm best friends with Justin Bieber or something."

WHAT KIND OF MUSIC ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

"I love all kinds of music. I love crooner music and music from back in the day. I like certain types of country. If it's game time, I'm probably listening to more EDM or techno to get my heart rate up, maybe some rock and roll. If I'm chilling, I'll even listen to classical music. I'm all over the place."





WHO HAS BEEN YOUR WINNIPEG TOUR GUIDE SO FAR?

"Adam Lowry has been the guy. He's helped me with my fantasy football team, different restaurants, coffee shops and just the lay of the land. Josh helped me get into the building the other day when it was my first time getting there. This team is very family-oriented. I feel like I could call anybody and ask them where to go and they'd be up for it."

WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING RIGHT NOW?

"Mostly I'm taking care of the family, but I've been watching *The Gentlemen*. I really love that show. I just finished the second season. *Peaky Blinders* is definitely one of my favourites. I love watching movies and going to the movie theatre too. My wife loves watching *Friends*, so we always go through a time of watching that. I love *The Office* too."



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FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Carlos Lopez and Jonathan Kozub

There will be goals and saves and championships won. There will be packed grandstands, screaming parents, nervous coaches and little hockey players carrying sticks almost as tall as they are.

But somewhere inside hockey for all centre this Christmas, Dean Court knows there will also be a grandmother standing at the front desk with one very important question:

Where is my grandson playing?

"What team is he on?"

"I don't know."

"How old is he?"

"Ten."

"What part of the city?"

"The South End."

And somehow, Court and the army of people who operate the Winnipeg Jets Challenge Cup will figure it out. They always do.

Because after nearly 15 years, almost 200 teams, thousands of players and tens of thousands of family members pouring through the doors, the biggest hockey tournament at hockey for all centre has become about considerably more than hockey. It has become Christmas in Winnipeg.

"It's a massive social," Court said with a smile. "You've got grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends. Everybody is excited about playing hockey and having a good time. I get goosebumps thinking about it."

The Winnipeg Jets Challenge Cup is the crown jewel of what has quietly become a remarkable tournament operation at hockey for all centre. Court, the long-time director of Jets Hockey Development, estimates the facility now operates nine tournaments during the season, ranging from elite U13, U15 and U17 events attracting teams from across Canada and the United States, to an expanding female tournament program and, beginning this season, a new pond hockey tournament at Camp Manitou.

But nothing compares with Christmas. In fact, nothing in Canada is even close. The Challenge Cup began with a wonderfully simple idea. Court and his colleagues looked around during the Christmas holidays and noticed two things: Kids were home from school and hockey for all centre had ice available. Why not put the two together?



PUT A BOW ON IT. A CHRISTMAS GIFT FROM HOCKEY. IT'S WINNIPEG JETS CHALLENGE CUP TIME

"We just said, 'Let's do a house league tournament,'" Court recalled. The first version attracted about 20 teams. Then came 30. Then more divisions were added. The tournament expanded into A hockey, adding U9, U11 and U13, followed by U15 and female divisions. And then the thing exploded.

Today, the Challenge Cup routinely attracts more than 180 teams (close to 200 in some years). Last year's event included about 2,400 players over nine or 10 days.

Teams now come from throughout Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario and the United States. Court has welcomed teams from places such as Regina, Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Dryden, Red Lake and Minot.

Registration for this year's tournament opened on Oct. 1, at 9 a.m. And if you wanted to play, you better have your mouse at the ready. Last year, according to hockey for all centre marketing manager Carlos Lopez, roughly 70 to 75 teams registered in the first hour.

Court said they can receive 100 to 140 registrations on opening day and generally have about 85 per cent of the tournament filled within the first two or three weeks.

"It's almost like buying tickets on Ticketmaster," Lopez said. And there's a reason for that. The Challenge Cup might have become enormous, but Court and his right-hand man, Dustin Madrigga, have never allowed it to lose the neighbourhood-hockey feeling that created it.

This isn't simply about trophies. It's kids. Parents. Community clubs. Hot chocolate. Music. Goodie bags. Player-of-the-game awards. Skate sharpening. Winnipeg Jets and Manitoba Moose prizes. It's grandparents filling the stands to watch U7 and U9 players chase pucks around half-ice. Court laughs that there might be one little "dangler" controlling the puck while another youngster appears more interested in picking imaginary dandelions.

Grandma and Grandpa don't care. That's their grandchild out there. "It's like going to a junior hockey game," Court said. "You can have 1,000 people watching U9 or U7 house league. The stands are packed."

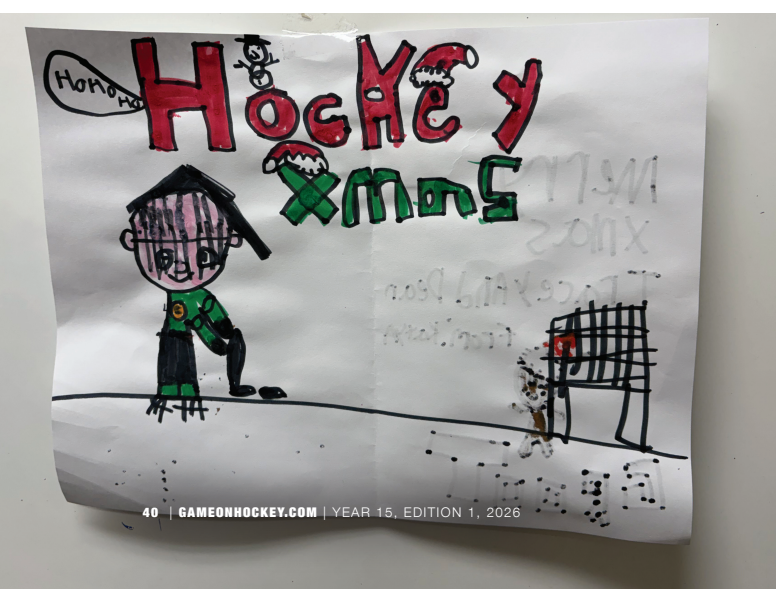
The tournament has also maintained a close relationship with community hockey. St. James Minor Hockey is a major local partner, while Assiniboine Park Hockey Association and organizations throughout Winnipeg are also represented.

Court is adamant that hockey for all centre's events should complement community clubs, not compete against them. "We don't want to take away from community centres," he said. "We want to include them."

Then there is the Jets connection. Players receive Jets and Moose ticket opportunities, while more than $100,000 worth of prizes have traditionally been distributed, including autographed jerseys, sticks, photographs and tickets. For a young house-league player, it can make Christmas hockey feel like the NHL.

And while Court is the face and driving force behind much of the tournament program, he is quick to point toward Madrigga, his long-time partner in building the events.

Court and Madrigga have spent years recruiting teams, developing contacts and finding opponents from outside Manitoba so Winnipeg teams aren't simply playing the same clubs they face during the regular season.



ALWAYS ON DEAN COURT'S WHITEBOARD. THIS IS WHAT IT'S ABOUT



NICE GOAL

That philosophy helped turn hockey for all centre into a tournament destination.

The U13 Elite tournament in early November has 16 teams and is sold out, with clubs coming from the United States, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

The U15 Elite event, scheduled for Nov. 19-22, is also sold out and includes teams from Illinois, Colorado and Vancouver. Because those players are entering an important scouting age, Court expects 75 to 100 scouts from NCAA programs and Tier I and Tier II junior leagues.

The U17 Elite follows Nov. 26-29, again bringing teams from outside Manitoba. After Christmas comes U15 AA, another event Court expects to sell out. A Swedish team is scheduled to return this year as part of its every-other-year visit.

But one of the developments that excites Court most has been the growth of the female tournament program. A friend once challenged him with a simple question: Why are you doing all this for the boys? What about the girls?

Court listened.

Last season hockey for all centre introduced U13 and U15 female tournaments. Both sold out. This year, U18 has been added. The U15 field is already full, U13 has attracted a strong field and the new U18 tournament is beginning to establish itself, with teams from Vancouver among those expressing interest. And Court insists the experience must be identical.



GOLIGHTLY READY TO LIGHT IT UP AT THE WINNIPEG JETS CHALLENGE CUP

"The girls get exactly what the boys get," he said. "They get the full experience."

That means music, presentation, atmosphere and all the little touches designed to make a minor hockey player feel like she has arrived in the big leagues.

The next experiment comes in March. Court and his group are planning a pond hockey tournament at Camp Manitou, initially targeting roughly 36 to 42 teams.

His approach will be the same one that turned a little Christmas house-league tournament into the Winnipeg Jets Challenge Cup.

Start small. Listen. Learn. Build.

"We build it for the community," Court said. "Once it's done, we ask the community, 'What can we do better?' They tell us what they loved and where we can improve. We repeat what they loved and replace the things that weren't good with something new and refreshing."

After more than 40 years in hockey as a player, coach, father and administrator - and nearly two decades with True North - Court has been around the highest levels of the sport.

Yet give him a choice between watching elite hockey and standing at the glass while a bunch of eight-year-olds chase a puck around hockey for all centre, and he might surprise you.

"I can sit and watch a U9 hockey game as much as I can watch an NHL game," Court said. "It's because I love the passion of the little kids who are just excited about playing the game. There's no glamour to this. There's nothing fancy. It's just good old-fashioned, community-based hockey."

Which probably explains why the Winnipeg Jets Challenge Cup works.

It began with 20 teams because there was some empty ice at Christmas.

Fifteen years later, the ice isn't empty anymore. Neither are the hallways or the stands.

And somewhere in the middle of all that wonderful Christmas chaos, there will undoubtedly be another grandmother looking for her 10-year-old granddaughter's rink. But don't worry, Dean Court and his team will find her.

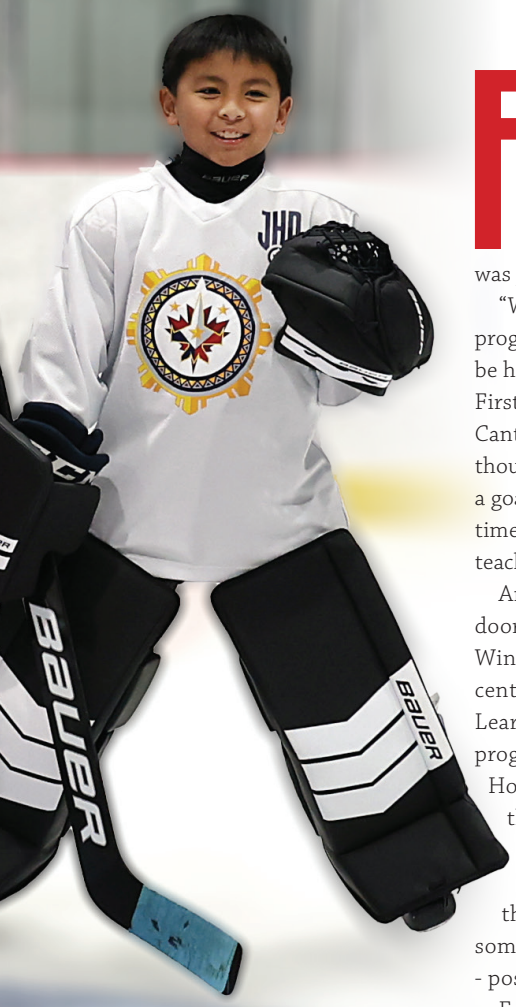


ICE LAB GOALIES FROM LEFT LEYLA VICENTE, KAI BALMES, BRAYLEN PRAGIDES AND LORENZO CANTIVEROS WITH COACH ANDY KOLLAR

BRING ON THE GOALIES

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by Carlos Lopez, Ron Cantiveros and James Carey Lauder



For years, the First Shift program has been teaching a new generation of Canadians how to become hockey players. There was just one problem.

"We ran this First Shift program teaching kids to be hockey players," said First Shift ambassador Ron Cantiveros. "And we never thought about teaching a goaltender. It's about time we started. We gotta teach kids to be goalies."

And with that, another door has opened at Winnipeg's hockey for all centre. A new six-week Learn to Play goaltending program through Jets Hockey Development and the Ice Lab is giving young players an opportunity to discover the most unique - and sometimes most intimidating - position in the game.

Funding for this new program was made possible through the donation from the Winnipeg Jets to the Filipino Heritage Sports Council which was intended to create new hockey development opportunities for the Filipino community here in Manitoba.

Among the youngsters getting their first taste of life between the pipes are three young goalies of Filipino heritage - Lorenzo Cantiveros, Braylen Pragides and Kai Balmes - who represent another important step in a much larger effort to introduce hockey to Winnipeg families from communities that historically haven't been deeply involved in the game. As well, a fourth goalie of Filipino Heritage, Leyla Vicente, joined the group for its second session. Leyla, a U11 goalie with the Rockets, had already fallen in love with the position.

"This is just her second season playing hockey," said her mom, Judith. "Leyla's journey started with First Shift in the spring of 2024. She loved it so much that she joined Second Shift. And then she decided she wanted to be in hockey. So, she started her first season in U9 with the Rockets as a regular player.

"However, because it's U9, each of the girls took turns playing goalie. And every time Leyla played goalie, she was just happier and happier. So, she did a few camps in the spring and then, just after the Filipino Heritage Jamboree, she decided to do a spring session at Ice Lab.

"I said, 'Okay, go into this as a regular player and then if you decide you still love being a goalie, then we'll support you going to do full-time goalie.'

And that's what happened. So, we signed her up for a full-time summer camp this summer at Ice Labs and this season she is starting her goalie career."

For Cantiveros, whose son Lorenzo is a 2017-born player, the new program seems like a natural extension of what has been happening through First Shift during the past four years.



BRAYLEN PRAGIDES GETS HIS GLOVE INTO THE PROPER POSITION

"So, David Sattler sent me an email about their new Learn to Play program at Ice Lab," Cantiveros said. "They were looking for younger players, 2016, 2017, 2018, like in the U9 (Division), kind of where they start learning and experimenting with being goalies. So, I got my son Lorenzo, a 2017, and two 2016 players in the Ice Lab.

"They started last Wednesday and they do it for six weeks. It's a training program there. It's a new program for Ice Lab, but it's also a bit of a shift for us in the sense that in the last four years, we've developed hockey players through First Shift. David had a very good idea."

And there might be no position in hockey that needs an introduction quite like goaltending. Just ask Andy Kollar.

The Ice Lab manager and former University of North Dakota goaltender - and NCAA National Champion - knows that becoming a goalie isn't simply a matter of strapping on a pair of pads, standing in front of a net and waiting for somebody to shoot. Although, admittedly, that's exactly what most eight-and nine-year-old aspiring goalies want to do.

"All they want is shots," Kollar laughed. "The first hour of the program, we didn't take shots and they were all standing there waiting for shots. I'm like, 'We're not even going to get to that part for a while. Let's talk about what's needed to be a goalie.'"

So, Kollar starts at the beginning. The *very* beginning: Stance. Balance. Skating. Knees. Hips. Ankles. Flexion. Angles. Depth.

These are concepts experienced goalies and coaches might take for granted. But tell an eight-year-old about the degrees of knee flexion required for a proper stance and you might as well be teaching advanced calculus.

"They don't know what a degree is," Kollar said with a laugh. "They don't know what 90 degrees is. They have no clue what that means.

"So, it's about turning these things into key talking points. We talked about angles and depth and then I asked them, 'Does everybody know what angles and depth mean?' Not one response.

"You take it for granted, right? So, it's breaking it down even further and further, giving these kids the knowledge of what terms are and what they're going to hear from goalie coaches."

Kollar has even brought Marvel's Iron Man into the crease. While explaining how a goalie squares up to the puck, Kollar realized a lesson about positioning might make considerably more sense to an eight-year-old if it involved a superhero.

"I said, 'Ironman has this flashlight on his chest, right? So, try to get your Ironman flashlight square to the puck.' And they all knew what I was talking about."

That might be the beauty of the new program. It isn't designed to manufacture the next Stuart Skinner in six weeks. It's designed to make a kid want to come back for Week Two.

Because, as Kollar knows, that first experience in goal can be brutal. A youngster might love the mask. Love the pads. Love the glove. Love the idea of being the last line of defence. Then somebody fires a puck at him or her. Or the poor kid allows 10 goals in his first game and suddenly the coolest position in hockey doesn't seem nearly as appealing.

"A lot of kids like the idea of it, but never had help," Kollar said. "So, when they get in the net and they get hit by a puck, they're like, 'I don't like this anymore.' Or they get in the net and they get scored on 10 times in a game for the first time and they're embarrassed and they don't want to do it again.





MAKING SURE LORENZO CANTIVEROS HAS A GOOD VIEW OF THE SHOT

"So, part of what we're doing is letting them know it's okay. Letting them know everybody starts from the beginning. This is going to give them a couple of tools to maybe have more success from the beginning. That's where the love of it comes."

The program also attacks another major barrier: Money. Goaltending equipment isn't cheap, and asking parents to invest in a complete set of equipment before knowing whether their child actually enjoys the position can be a non-starter.

The Learn to Play program has quick-change goalie equipment that youngsters can wear over their regular player gear. Pads fit over shin pads, protective equipment works with their existing shoulder pads, and goalie sticks are supplied. It allows a child to try the position without Mom and Dad having to make a major financial commitment.

"It's an expensive position," Kollar said. "For a parent to go and buy full gear without knowing that their kid is actually going to want to do it is another thing altogether. The gear we have will help out with kids that don't know, in that transition period, if they want to do it or not."

And eliminating barriers has been at the heart of First Shift and the hockey for all centre's Grow the Game initiatives from the beginning.

Sattler has long argued that hockey must reach beyond its traditional base as Winnipeg and Manitoba become increasingly diverse. First Shift, Grow the Game and related programming have worked to introduce hockey to Filipino, South Asian and other communities while providing equipment, instruction and a welcoming entry point into a sport that can appear complicated and expensive from the outside.

The philosophy goes beyond simply increasing minor hockey registration. It's about creating a relationship with the game. A child who goes through First Shift might eventually play AAA hockey. Or house league. Or become a coach. Or a referee. Or simply lace up a pair of skates with friends at an outdoor rink.

Sattler has said that when hockey puts a stick into the hands of a five-year-old, nobody knows where that stick will take that child. The point is providing the opportunity in the first place. Now that opportunity includes the crease.

For Lorenzo Cantiveros, Braylen Pragides and Kai Balmes, it means learning a position they might otherwise have been asked to figure out on their own. And Kollar believes that matters. Because goalies, he admits, can sometimes be the forgotten players.

Six youngsters participated in the first session, and the program is still very much in its infancy. Nobody is predicting exactly where it will lead or how large it might eventually become.

For now, Kollar is teaching youngsters how to stand properly, how to skate in goalie equipment, how to understand angles and how to point their imaginary Ironman light toward the puck. Most importantly, he's trying to make sure they leave the rink wanting to come back.

"I think it's important," Kollar said. "I think it's needed. I try to make it fun. Try to make games out of it."

And maybe, somewhere among those wide-eyed youngsters pulling on goalie pads for the first time, there's a kid who will fall hopelessly in love with stopping pucks.

That, after all, is what First Shift has always been about: Give a youngster the equipment. Give them the ice. Give them some instruction. Give them a chance. And now, finally, give somebody the pads.



WORKING ON THE CORRECT STANCE WITH LEYLA VICENTE



THE ORIGINAL JET, NORM BEAUDIN

HOCKEYBALL

Sport for Life

STREET
EQUIPMENT + TRAINING + CURRICULUM

FROM THE ORIGINAL JET TO THE NEXT GENERATION

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos courtesy of Hockeyball and hockey for all centre

HOCKEYBALL, THE WINNIPEG JETS AND A GROUNDBREAKING SCHOOL PROGRAM ARE PUTTING STICKS IN YOUNG HANDS AND OPENING THE GAME TO EVERYONE.

More than half a century after Norm Beaudin became the first player signed by the original Winnipeg Jets, the Beaudin family is still helping introduce hockey to Winnipeg.

Only this time, the players don't need skates, expensive equipment or even a sheet of ice. They just need a stick, a ball and an opportunity to run.

And thanks to an expanding partnership involving Hockeyball, the Winnipeg Jets, Sport for Life and the Winnipeg School Division, thousands of Manitoba youngsters are about to get exactly that.

It's called *Jets Street – School Floor Hockey Program,* and it might be one of the most important grassroots hockey initiatives introduced in Winnipeg in years.

Beginning in November, all 65 Winnipeg School Division elementary and middle-schools will have access to a complete Hockeyball program, including equipment, teacher training and a six-week instructional curriculum.

For Hockeyball's Greg Beaudin, son of the Original Jet, it's another significant step in a journey that has taken the sport from a family-driven vision to partnerships with NHL franchises and school systems across Canada.

And the timing couldn't be better.

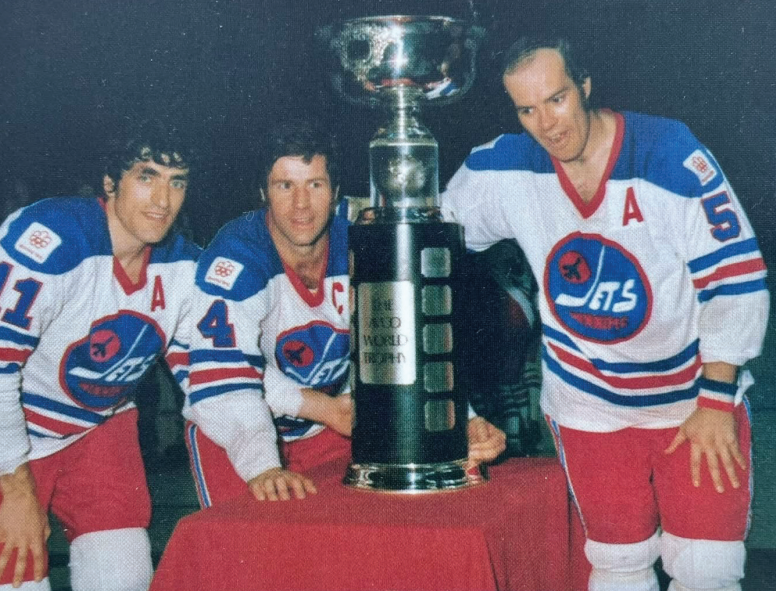
"The Jets floor hockey program is kind of like perfect timing, being rolled out at the very same time as this new curriculum rolls out in Manitoba schools," Beaudin said. "It all aligns. It's seamless. We must activate our kids with low-cost, barrier-free team sport solutions like the new Jets Floor Hockey program.

The new program, developed through the efforts of David Sattler and the team at hockey for all centre, arrives alongside Manitoba's renewed emphasis on physical education and physical literacy.

Beaudin believes the combination could change how thousands of young people experience hockey. And he's not alone.

Dr. Dean Kriellaars, a University of Manitoba researcher and internationally respected authority on physical literacy, has enthusiastically supported the initiative as he fully understands the role that Floorball, also known as Innebandy in Sweden, plays in enhancing movement, health and wellness.

For Beaudin, that kind of endorsement demonstrates how far Hockeyball has progressed.



THE CAPTAINS WITH THE 1976 AVCO CUP, FROM LEFT NORM BEAUDIN, LARS-ERIK SJOBERG AND LARRY HORNUNG.



EVERY KID LOVES HOCKEYBALL

The program isn't simply about handing youngsters a plastic stick and telling them to play. It's about providing schools with an accessible, sustainable introduction to Canada's national winter sport.

Each participating school will receive 40 Hockeyball (Floorball) sticks, 50 indoor balls and a Jets-branded storage bag. Teachers will have access to a six-week lesson plan, instructional drills, online resources and training support.

Best of all, the equipment stays with the school. That means hockey can become part of regular physical education classes, before- and after-school activities and future recreational programming.

No ice. No skates. No expensive protective equipment. No barriers. And that's exactly what Hockeyball has been trying to accomplish for years. No surprise, the momentum is growing nationally.

The Vancouver Canucks have embraced school-based floor hockey programming, and Beaudin says the Ottawa Senators have now joined Hockeyball's expanding network.

The long-term ambition is enormous: introduce accessible hockey programming into all of Canada's schools.

It's an ambitious objective, but one rooted in the philosophy that has driven Greg, his brother Dave and their father Norm for years.

Hockey belongs to everybody. Wheelchair athletes, athletes of all abilities, Special Olympians - all can play. And this October, that philosophy will come full circle in Winnipeg.

When the Jets host the Montreal Canadiens in the 2026 NHL Heritage Classic at Princess Auto Stadium on Sunday, Oct. 25, Norm Beaudin will be back in the city where his remarkable Jets story began.

The man who played alongside Bobby Hull and Christian Bordeleau on Winnipeg's famous Luxury Line, and helped the Jets capture the 1976 AVCO Cup, will be part of Hockeyball's Heritage Classic celebrations.

Hockeyball plans to fly Norm into Winnipeg for the festivities, including Saturday's Fan Fest at the Winnipeg Convention Centre, where a Jets-branded Hockeyball rink will welcome youngsters and their families. Mick E. Moose is also expected to attend, while Jets alumni will drop by to meet fans and sign autographs.

For Greg Beaudin, it's another opportunity to connect hockey's remarkable past with its increasingly accessible future.

Fifty-four years after his father helped launch the original Jets, the Beaudin family is still working to grow the game. Only now, the next generation of Jets might get its start on a school gymnasium floor.

And there is no doubt that Norm Beaudin will be smiling. Because the most important thing isn't where a youngster first plays hockey. It's that somebody puts a stick in their hands.



JETS HOCKEYBALL



THE GAME CHANGERS. HOCKEYBALL'S GREG (LEFT) AND DAVE BEAUDIN



HOCKEYBALL

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hockeyball.com

THE CAPTAIN WHO RUNS THE SHOW

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos by Darryl Gershman and Rusty Barton

Samantha Carvalho thought she was finished with competitive hockey. That notion lasted about a year. Turns out, hockey wasn't finished with Samantha Carvalho.

Today, the 21-year-old forward is captain of the Polar Ice of the Manitoba Women's Junior Hockey League. She is also a university student preparing for a career in education, a U17 AAA girls hockey coach and, according to Polar Ice head coach Dave Benediktson, quite simply the best captain he has ever coached.

And Benediktson has been doing this for about 40 years.

"Oh, she's just the best," Benediktson said. "She runs the whole show. She brings the speakers, she runs the warm-up, she does the pre-game talk. She takes care of the younger players during the game. She's in charge of the player-of-the-game speech. She does everything.

"Plus, she's the nicest person in the world."

That pretty much sums it up. She is a player who found hockey relatively late, walked away from it briefly, discovered how much she missed it and came back to become the heartbeat of her team.

"Sammie" Carvalho grew up in a sports family and started playing ringette at age four. She played for five years before finally making the move to the sport she had always loved.

"I grew up watching so much hockey, especially with my dad playing hockey," Carvalho said. "I loved playing ringette because I made a lot of friends, but there was always a love of hockey and I always knew I eventually wanted to switch over."

The skating foundation was already there. Eventually, the hands and hockey skills caught up.

She played A2 and A1 with the Rockets before moving into high school hockey at Garden City. And unlike many players who dominate early and simply stay ahead of the pack, Carvalho believes her development came gradually.

"I blossomed later in my hockey career," she said. "I definitely got a lot better as I got older."

Then, after high school, she stopped. Carvalho enrolled at the University of Winnipeg and figured competitive hockey had run its course. She played some beer league during the 2022-23 season, but that experiment didn't last.



CAPTAIN OF POLAR ICE, SAMANTHA CARVALHO



"I miss playing competitive hockey," she remembered thinking. "I miss that intensity, that drive."

She watched younger sister Cassie play with MFHL U18 AAA champion Winnipeg Ice and realized there was an enormous hole in her life

"I didn't realize how big of a place it was in my heart until it wasn't there," Carvalho said. "I had a void, and I needed to fill it."

So, in the fall of 2023, she tried out for the MWJHL and landed with Polar Ice. She called it "a blessing in disguise."

It became much more than that.

Carvalho is now in her third season wearing the 'C,' an honour that means considerably more to her because her teammates chose her.

"It means so much to me knowing I was voted on by my teammates," she said. "Just knowing the fact that they trust me to lead this team.

"I don't have to be the strongest player out there all the time, but I can lead by example. If I have a good outlook with my attitude, then I can encourage others to do well."

Perhaps nothing explains Carvalho better than her philosophy about the letter on her sweater.

"Just because I wear a letter doesn't mean I am owed ice time," she said. "I go out there and I try my hardest to deserve everything. I don't want anything handed to me."

That leadership extends well beyond the Polar Ice.

Carvalho is pursuing an integrated education degree at the University of Winnipeg. She already has a Bachelor of Arts with a French major and psychology minor and is now working toward her Bachelor of Education.

She loves kids and the plan is to teach, but that's no surprise. She's already coaching them. Carvalho has coached for the past three years at Garden City, moved into U18 AA last season and is now coaching U17 AAA girls alongside longtime friend Mackenzie Kubas - another friendship forged through hockey.

She has also become something of an unofficial recruiter for the MWJHL, recommending it to young players who want to continue competitive hockey while pursuing school and careers.

"I think it's a really positive space for young women," Carvalho said. "It still gives us the sense we're playing high-level hockey and pursuing an education and working. Everyone is very supportive. There's a real community."



Hockey is also very much a Carvalho family affair.

Younger sister Cassie now plays university hockey at UBC, and Samantha readily admits that despite being the older sister, she looks up to Cassie's dedication and work ethic. Meanwhile, dad Paul is an assistant coach with Polar Ice.

For Samantha, it has provided the unexpected gift of sharing hockey with her father again as an adult.

"I've gone back in time and gotten to have those moments again with my dad," she said. "It's awesome."

Now there is one final item on Carvalho's MWJHL wish list: An MWJHL championship.

This is her final season as a player, and after Polar Ice came agonizingly close last year, Carvalho wants one more crack at it with a group she calls the best she has ever played with.

"We were so close," she said. "This year we're hungry because we were so close we could taste it. We want it bad."

And when her playing days end? Carvalho apparently isn't going very far.

Benediktson says the plan is to bring his captain onto the Polar Ice coaching staff as an assistant next season — with an eye toward her eventually becoming head coach. Which seems appropriate. After all, according to Benediktson, she's already running the show.

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HAVING COFFEE WITH THE NEW OWNER OF THE ROYAL KNIGHTS, MANNY MINUK

THE ROYAL SUCCESSION

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Dave Willson and Scott Taylor

AFTER 45 YEARS, BARRY BONNI HAS FINALLY SOLD HIS RIVER EAST ROYAL KNIGHTS. BUT HE DIDN'T REALLY SELL A HOCKEY TEAM. HE ENTRUSTED HIS LIFE'S WORK TO ONE OF HIS OWN.

Barry Bonni always knew this day would come. He just wasn't going to let it come with the wrong guy on the other end of the bargain.

For 45 years, the River East Royal Knights have been Bonni's hockey team. He founded them. Coached them. Managed them. Owned them. Worried about them. Won championships with them. Paid the bills. Found the players. Bought the equipment. Sat through the league meetings and, more often than not, remembered why some obscure rule was written in the first place.

The Royal Knights weren't simply something Barry Bonni owned. They were Barry Bonni.

So, when the 74-year-old finally decided it was time to sell the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League franchise he founded in 1981, there was one requirement that mattered more than the purchase price: the new owner had to understand what he was buying.

Enter Manny Minuk. He understands. Of course, he should. He's a true Royal Knight.

"I wouldn't have sold it to just anybody," Bonni said. "For all the money in the world."

And with that, one of the longest-running ownership eras in Manitoba junior hockey has come to an end - sort of.

Bonni has sold the River East Royal Knights to Minuk, the club's 46-year-old head coach, former player and former championship Knight. But Barry isn't exactly disappearing.

Minuk has asked his old coach to remain as club president and mentor while the new owner learns the parts of junior hockey ownership that nobody sees from behind the bench.

"It's his team now, but he asked me to stay on as president and mentor him," Bonni said. "So, I'm doing that."

For Minuk, there was never any intention of buying the Royal Knights and immediately putting his own stamp on the franchise. In fact, almost the opposite is true.

He bought the team because he wants the Royal Knights to remain the Royal Knights.

"I promised him that I wanted the same thing he did," Minuk said. "I don't want to go rebrand and change everything and tear everything down. I don't necessarily think that's needed.

"I felt like the Bonni family should always be part of it in some capacity."

That might be the most important reason the deal actually happened. Bonni started the Royal Knights in 1981 after the East Kildonan Knights folded. At the time, he couldn't imagine an area the size of River East without a junior hockey team, so he created one himself.

He combined the Royals name from River East Minor Hockey with the Knights name from the former East Kildonan franchise and the River East Royal Knights were born. Then he simply never left.

This is Bonni's 45th season with the Knights and, when combined with eight years coaching minor hockey, it's his 53rd consecutive year coaching, managing or operating hockey teams. Along the way, he built one of the MMJHL's signature franchises.



LONGTIME OWNER AND ONETIME HEAD COACH BARRY BONNI BEHIND THE BENCH

He has coached more than 1,000 MMJHL games, won more than 700 of them, captured six league championships and was named Coach of the Year four times. His Royal Knights won four consecutive championships from 1986 through 1990, and Bonni was inducted into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame in 2017. His final championship as head coach came in 2000-01.

One of his players was Manny Minuk, who produced 88 points in 80 games during two seasons with River East. In his first season, the Knights won the Jack McKenzie Trophy. In his second, they returned to the championship final.

Twenty-five years later, that former player now owns the team. There is something beautifully circular about it.

Minuk grew up in East St. Paul and played minor hockey with the Marauders, Kodiaks and Sharks before leaving for Edmonton to attend college. He came close to making the hockey team at NAIT, but with school taking priority, he stepped away from competitive hockey.

When he returned home, he still had two years of MMJHL eligibility remaining. That brought him to Bonni and the Royal Knights.

After junior, Minuk played senior hockey briefly before his children arrived and coaching became his connection to the game. Eventually, hockey brought him back into Bonni's orbit. Last season, Bonni hired his former player as head coach of the Royal Knights - now he has sold him the franchise.

At the league meeting where the ownership change was announced, Bonni laid out Minuk's progression almost perfectly. Minuk had been a player in the league - and a champion. Then he became the parent of a player. Then a coach. Now, an owner/coach.

Even Minuk hadn't considered his journey quite that way. The other MMJHL owners apparently approved. Minuk said the announcement was greeted with warm applause, but to be fair, he already has some respect around the league. After all, those same people had voted him MMJHL Coach of the Year last season.

For Bonni, however, this wasn't about winning a popularity contest. It was about survival. "The last thing I would want is in two or three years the team folds," he said. "If I wasn't confident that he'd make a go of it, I would not make this deal. I would just continue running the team until the right person came along."

Minuk became the right person almost organically. He noticed Bonni was doing virtually everything himself and simply asked if he needed some help.

Bonni's response? Maybe he'd sell the team.

"I don't know if I convinced him," Minuk said. "I think he realized or he felt that he was running out of time. He was doing everything on his own... I just kind of asked him one day if he needed a little more help with this stuff. And he just said, 'Well, maybe I'd sell the team.' And that's just how the conversation sort of started."



MANNY MINUK JR

THE ASSISTANT COACHES IN THEIR PLAYING DAYS

Bonni had received expressions of interest over the years, but nothing he considered serious enough to pursue. Money was never going to be the determining factor. Legacy was.

Now Minuk intends to protect that legacy while building on it. He will remain head coach, with his son Manny Minuk Jr. and former Royal Knights captains Anthony Jacob and newcomer Layne Richardson on the coaching staff. Richardson, last season's MMJHL Hardest Working Player, gives the organization another young hockey mind with ties to the club.

Off the ice, Minuk is assembling a larger support group. His wife Lexi is helping with accounting, admissions and game-day operations. Kevin Greig will work on sponsorship. Greig's wife, Cara, is expected to operate a canteen once space can be arranged at Terry Sawchuk Arena. And former Knight Branden Douglas is helping to create an alumni association.

The objective is simple: make playing for the Royal Knights better and make attending a Royal Knights game more enjoyable.

"We're going to grow this thing based on having some sponsorship," Minuk said. "And just try to make the whole experience for the players a little bit better and for the fans... That's kind of our whole deal - to try to create a better game-day experience for fans and get fans back in the building."

Minuk brings something else to the ownership chair: business experience.

He runs a denture clinic and has already lived through a generational transition in business with his own father. That experience has shaped the way he views Bonni's continued presence.

"I'm never going to ask him to leave," Minuk said. "To me, it's still like his team, obviously. I went through the same thing with my dad at the denture clinic. I understand what legacy means to these guys."

That might explain this entire transaction better than anything else. Minuk isn't buying something from Barry Bonni. He's carrying something forward for him.

Bonni, meanwhile, is already enjoying watching his successor rebuild some of the organizational infrastructure that naturally disappeared as the years passed.

Many of the volunteers and contacts who once helped Bonni have retired, moved on or died. Bonni himself has been retired from his professional life for eight years, making sponsorship and business contacts increasingly difficult to maintain. Now Minuk has the energy and connections to start rebuilding.

Bonni sees him doing some of the same things he did 30 years ago. And that makes stepping away a little easier. Although, not completely away. There are still league meetings. There is still paperwork. There is still the Hockey Canada registry to learn. There are still 45 years worth of knowledge that Minuk can't possibly absorb overnight - so Barry will be there. For now.

"Next year, he's on his own," Bonni joked. "I hope he remembers what I'm teaching him because I'm going to look outside and if it's snowing out, I'm going to say, 'Oh good, I'm going to stay home.'

"After 53 years, I've done my time and I think I deserve the break."

He certainly does. 45 years ago, Barry Bonni climbed onto what he once called his "white horse" because he couldn't accept the idea that River East would no longer have a junior hockey team. So, he created one.

Then he spent more than half his life making certain it survived. Now, finally, Barry Bonni has passed the reins. But he made damn sure the next guy riding that horse was already a Royal Knight.



ANTHONY JACOB

LAYNE RICHARDSON



HERE COME THE UNDEFEATED AVROS

THE SHOW BEFORE THE SHOW

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

FOR 16 YEARS, FERDI NELISSEN'S CENTRAL PLAINS SHOWCASE HAS GIVEN FEMALE U18 AAA TEAMS A PLACE TO FIND THEIR LEGS, COACHES A CHANCE TO FIND THEIR LINEUPS AND UNIVERSITY SCOUTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FIND THEIR NEXT GROUP OF PLAYERS. THIS SEPTEMBER'S EVENT ALSO OFFERED A TANTALIZING GLIMPSE AT WHAT COULD BE ONE WILD MFHL U18 AAA SEASON.



Before there are standings, before there are playoff races and before anybody starts seriously talking about championships, Ferdi Nelissen likes to get everybody in the same building and let the hockey do the talking.

Four games. Three full 20-minute periods. No trophy. No playoff bracket. No meaningless championship game. Just hockey.

For 16 years - with one COVID cancellation along the way - Nelissen has operated the Central Plains U18 AAA Female Hockey Showcase in Portage la Prairie, an event that has quietly become one of the traditional starting points for another Manitoba Female Hockey League U18 AAA season.

And all these years later, its purpose remains wonderfully uncomplicated: get good teams together. Give them meaningful preseason games. Give coaches an opportunity to evaluate their players. Give players a chance to be seen. Then get out of the way.

"I'd been coaching out here and after a couple of years I just went, 'Geez, there's nothing for us to get the season going,'" Nelissen recalled.

So, he created something. In those early years, the Showcase also became a significant recruiting stop. Nelissen would contact university programs and sometimes 25 or 30 schools would have representatives in Portage watching prospective recruits.

The world has changed. Today, with games streamed and archived, university coaches can scout the event from hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away. They can watch a player live, replay the game later and go back over the same shift four times if they wish.

Some schools still attend in person, particularly programs looking to establish early relationships with recruits, but technology has changed the scouting landscape.

What technology hasn't changed is the hockey. Nelissen believes one of the Showcase's greatest strengths is that teams actually get to play real hockey - full games, not abbreviated showcase versions.



THE SHOWCASE IS ABOUT HOCKEY, FRIENDS AND FUN



CAPS ON THE RUSH



HAWKS VS. AVROS



"I run full three 20-minute games," he said. "Unlike other showcases that charge probably $1,000 more and run 15-minute periods, I give the teams a full game. Universities like that because they get a real good look at players that way.

"They get four games. It's not a tournament. It's a showcase. You're playing four designated games and away you go. You're on with your season and it's a great way to kick it off."

That's precisely why Winnipeg Ice head coach Eugene Kaminsky keeps coming back.

"The Central Plains Showcase has always been a great start to the season," Kaminsky said. "It's an opportunity to play league teams as well as out-of-town teams.

"For us, we treat them as organized exhibition games - that we don't have to organize. It allows us to get in four games before our season begins. Always gives us a good sense of our team and what we need to work on."

Winnipeg Avros coach Ashley Van Aggelen sees much the same value.

"It's always a great preseason showcase and a chance for the girls to get their feet wet amongst competition they will see through the league this year," Van Aggelen said.

Her Avros did considerably more than get their feet wet. They went 4-0, defeating Pembina Valley 2-0, Westman 4-0, Interlake 9-2 and Notre Dame 4-1.

FROM LEFT, ROEY FOLSTER, KAYLIN LINS, BROOKE FROESE, AUBREY SYKES OF THE UNDEFEATED AVROS ENJOYING THE 2026 CENTRAL PLAINS SHOWCASE

"We played very well and executed on a lot of things we've been working towards," Van Aggelen said. "Going undefeated is always a nice confidence boost."

This year's Showcase had a slightly different complexion because of the Canada Games cycle. Saskatchewan's provincial-team commitments reduced participation from that province - Nelissen had three Saskatchewan teams a year ago and only one this time - but Notre Dame attended and has already indicated it intends to return.

For Nelissen, however, the Showcase's value goes well beyond one weekend. It's something that can make everybody better.

And he believes the improving week-to-week competition in Manitoba is one reason the province's best teams are becoming increasingly capable of handling strong Saskatchewan opponents when regional championship time arrives.

"The tougher your league is and the tougher it is to play every game, especially through the playoffs, the more likely you're going to be prepared to play good teams out of Saskatchewan," Nelissen said.

Which brings us to the other reason Nelissen's observations carry some weight. He doesn't just run the Showcase. He's also executive on the board of the MFHL U18 AAA league, along with being a longtime coach and scout.

And after spending another weekend watching teams up close, he has reached one rather intriguing conclusion about the 2026-27 season: "Buckle up."

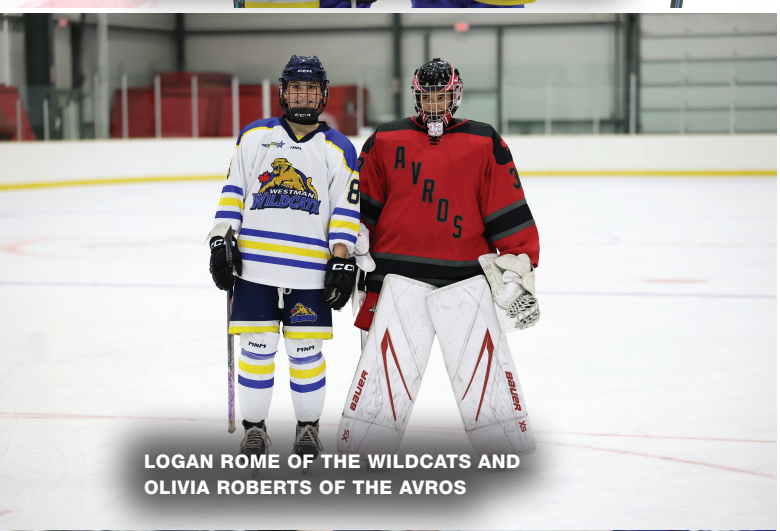
"This could be one of the tightest years you'll ever see from top to bottom," he said.



GABBY ROBBINS OF THE WINNIPEG ICE AND BREE PEARCE OF THE PEMBINA VALLEY HAWKS



WILDCATS IVY FRY (9) AND ADI HENWOOD (15)



LOGAN ROME OF THE WILDCATS AND OLIVIA ROBERTS OF THE AVROS



ON THE INTERLAKE BENCH AT THE 2026 CENTRAL PLAINS SHOWCASE

FERDI'S FORECAST

The first thing Nelissen noticed at the Showcase wasn't necessarily who was best. It was how young everybody was.

He called it the youngest version of the league he has ever seen, with only Interlake and Yellowhead carrying more than five graduating players.

That creates uncertainty. It also creates speed, development and the possibility that the team you see in September could look considerably different by February.

"The pace was really good," Nelissen said. "It's going to be a young league and that's good. I like that."

So, who does he like?

Right now, Nelissen sees three teams separating themselves from the field: the Winnipeg Avros, Winnipeg Ice and Eastman Selects.

"I think they just have the numbers to stay on top - more kids to select from," he said.

Nelissen believes two of those three are the most likely clubs to eventually reach the league final, although he certainly isn't suggesting anybody start engraving a name on a trophy in September.

Yellowhead tied the Ice at the Showcase. Westman impressed him despite losing players from last season. Central Plains has possibilities. Interlake has already demonstrated it can make life uncomfortable for the contenders.

Still, the Ice caught his attention.

Coach Kaminsky had significant roster turnover, but Nelissen believes Winnipeg remains balanced, young enough to improve substantially during the season and, perhaps most importantly, extremely strong in goal.

"He finds a way," Nelissen said of Kaminsky. "He had a big turnover, but they looked good here in the Showcase.

"They've probably got the best one-two goalie punch in the league and you know as well as I do, when it comes down to playoffs, you need good goaltending."

He also likes what he sees from the Avros — a team that left Portage undefeated and then carried its strong play into the early season.

"They were big, moved the puck well and they've got good speed and size throughout the lineup," Nelissen said.

After those three? Good luck figuring that out. Nelissen considers Westman an early candidate to lead the next group, but believes Central Plains and Yellowhead could be right there, while Interlake and Pembina Valley could emerge as the league's surprises.

That overall uncertainty might ultimately be the best news the MFHL could receive.

Nelissen believes an eight-team league with competitive games throughout the schedule creates better players, better teams and, ultimately, better Manitoba representatives when they venture beyond the provincial border.

And perhaps that's the perfect connection between the league and the Showcase he started all those years ago. The Central Plains Showcase has never really been about winning September. It's about finding out what you have and where you're going.



ALEX MYERS

A NEW DAWG: GOALIE ALEX MYERS FINDS A NEW NET, AND A NEW BALANCE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of Rayme Thomson and the Arborg Ice Dawgs

Sometimes the best move a goaltender can make isn't a save. Sometimes it's knowing when to leave the crease you're in and find another one.

Not For Alex Myers, that meant leaving the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, returning home to the Interlake, enrolling at Red River Polytechnic and rediscovering a version of hockey that fits perfectly with where his life is headed.

And if the 20-year-old from Stonewall happens to help turn the Ice Dawgs into one of the teams to watch in the Capital Region Junior Hockey League this season? Well, that works too.

After spending the past two seasons with the MJHL's Neepawa Titans, including 20 games last season, Myers decided it was time for something different. Not less hockey. Just more life.

The former Interlake Lightning AAA standout is studying Business Administration at Red River Polytechnic, with an eye toward eventually joining and taking over the family business. Trying to combine school with the demands of Junior A hockey - the practices, travel, bus rides and 56-game schedule - wasn't exactly an ideal fit.

"The MJ is a lot of work," Myers said. "Every day you're on the ice. Bus trips and everything. It's tougher to go to school that way. It's more of a full-time thing."

So, Myers dropped a level and came home. He joined the Ice Dawgs in Arborg, where a shorter Junior B schedule gives him the opportunity to concentrate on school while still playing competitive hockey. Better yet, he walked into a dressing room filled with familiar faces.

"I've got a lot of friends that I've played with in Interlake and we'll have some fun," Myers said. "We should have a good team."

There's another pretty good reason for optimism. The guy wearing the goalie equipment has played at the Jr. A level. Ice Dawgs coach Jack Einarson has only had a brief look at Myers so far, but he has already seen enough to understand what the veteran netminder can bring.

"I've only seen him skate a couple times, but from what I've seen I've been very impressed," Einarson said. "He's been very professional in his time here. He's looked very solid at our practices, so we're quite excited to have him on board this year."



ANOTHER WIN FOR GOALTENDER ALEX MYERS AND THE ARBORG ICE DAWGS



COACH JACK EINARSON WITH GOALIE ALEX MYERS



ALEX MYERS IN HIS NEW LOCKER ROOM IN ARBORG

Einarson knows there will be an adjustment. In fact, he understands Myers' situation better than most. He has made the same move himself - from the MJHL to the CRJHL - and knows that dropping down a level doesn't necessarily mean simply walking in and dominating. The game is different.

"It took some time at the beginning for me, I won't lie, getting accustomed to a different pace and how the game is played," Einarson said. "But once he figures that out - and it won't take long - I think he's going to be solid."

Myers certainly brings plenty of experience. Before joining Neepawa at 17, he came through the Interlake Lightning AAA program, playing at the U15, U17 and U18 levels. His hockey roots, however, stretch all the way back to Stonewall Minor Hockey, and a father who unknowingly may have predetermined his son's position.

Alex's dad, Scott, was a goalie. So, naturally, the kid wanted to try it. Myers was about seven when his team's goaltender decided he wanted to become a player. Alex volunteered to wear the big pads.

"I was like, 'I'll try playing goalie,'" he recalled. He liked it. His parents, Scott and Michelle, suddenly had a goaltender in the family - although Dad could hardly complain.

"I don't think my dad had much of a choice because he was also a goalie," Myers laughed. What appealed to Alex about the position was wonderfully uncomplicated. "I just liked making saves, I guess," he said. "I like being a part of the action all the time."

There is, of course, nowhere to hide when you're a goalie. Every mistake can become a goal. Every big save can change a game. Pressure simply comes with the equipment. Myers learned early that handling it is largely a matter of perspective.

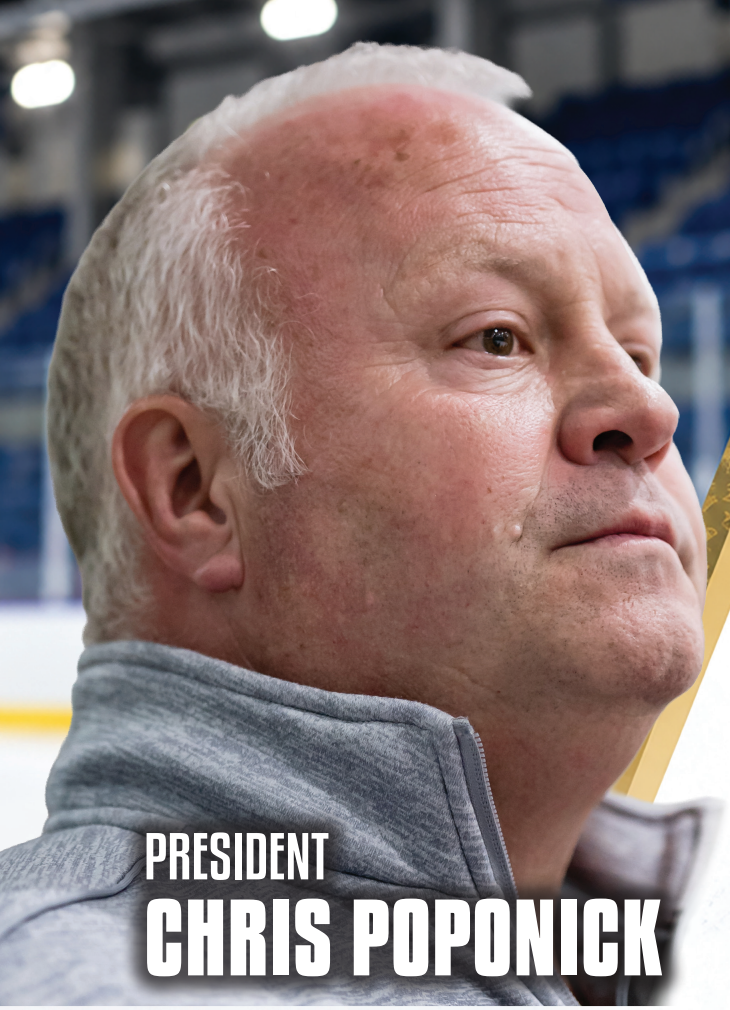
"You can make it stressful, or you can make it pretty carefree," he said. "It all depends on your frame of mind."

That approach might serve him particularly well this season. Myers decided to play in Arborg because it works - for school, for hockey and for life - and because he believes playing with old friends can make the game fun again.

For the Ice Dawgs, meanwhile, his arrival could be significant. Coach Einarson has a number of talented returning players and believes the club can take another step this season. Adding an experienced 20-year-old goaltender who has spent the last two years facing Junior A shooters gives the Ice Dawgs another important piece.

"He's going to come in and he's going to be playing minutes for us," Einarson said. "We're looking to have a very strong season, so he's going to be a big part of that."

For Myers, though, this season is about more than wins, losses and save percentages. It's about balance. School at Red River. Preparing for a future in the family business. Hockey with old teammates and friends. And another season in the crease he first wandered into as a seven-year-old kid in Stonewall. Turns out, coming home doesn't mean going backward. For Alex Myers, it might be exactly the save he needed.



PRESIDENT
CHRIS POPONICK

CRJHL 2026-27 SEASON PREVIEW

CRJHL GROWING - BUT NOT TOO FAST

The Capital Region Junior Hockey League has discovered something every successful hockey operation eventually learns: sometimes the smartest way to grow is to know when to stop.

After adding three franchises in recent years, including the expansion Altona Maroons for the 2026-27 season, the CRJHL has reached eight teams. And while league president Chris Poponick can envision a day when the circuit grows to 10 or even 12 clubs, he isn't interested in getting there tomorrow.

"Eight is comfortable," Poponick said. "Let's sit here for a bit. Let's see where things go."

For now, things appear to be going extremely well. The defending champion La Broquerie Habs enter only their third season in the league, while Altona becomes the newest addition to a circuit that has also welcomed Beauséjour during its recent expansion.

In fact, another potential franchise applied to become the league's ninth team this season, but the CRJHL decided against expansion because of concerns about whether there were enough players to properly stock another roster.

For Poponick, that remains the key.

"We don't want to deplete the ranks completely," he said. Early indications suggest the league's player pool is in excellent shape.

Most CRJHL teams attracted more than 40 players to training camp, while even clubs with smaller turnouts were seeing 25 to 30 hopefuls. More importantly, Poponick said the quality of players battling for roster spots has been impressive.

One camp, Poponick's own Selkirk Fishermen, attracted 44 players and only three immediately appeared to be out of the running.

"The rest of them, yeah, they got a chance," Poponick said. "They can show us something in an exhibition game and, depending on the way they play and the style they play, they might just fit into the puzzle."

That depth has created considerable optimism entering the new season.

Poponick acknowledged the league will continue monitoring some of its smaller-market franchises and wants to ensure North Winnipeg remains strong. But overall, he believes the CRJHL is entering 2026-27 from a position of strength.

"The league is very strong that way as far as players go," he said. "Everybody's in a great spot."

And someday, eight might become 10. Or 12. Perhaps the league eventually moves to multiple divisions as its footprint expands. But there is no rush.

The CRJHL has definitely grown.

For now, Poponick and the league's board want to make sure that growth sticks.

FROM THE KJHL TO COLLEGE HOCKEY

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy Kelly Jacobson and the ACHA

MANITOBA'S KEYSTONE JUNIOR B HOCKEY LEAGUE IS BECOMING A SPRINGBOARD TO THE ACHA. IT'S GIVING 19-21-YEAR-OLD HOCKEY PLAYERS FROM THE NORTH A CHANCE TO KEEP PLAYING AND PURSUE AN EDUCATION AFTER FINISHING HIGH SCHOOL AND/OR AGING OUT OF JUNIOR.



HARLAN JACOBSON OUTSIDE LAKE REGION STATE COLLEGE

The final horn no longer has to mean the end of the dream.

And in northern Manitoba, inside rinks where the boards shake and the fans lean into every shift, the OCN Storm didn't just defend a title this spring, they reinforced a legacy.

For a growing number of players from Manitoba's Keystone Junior Hockey League, aging out of junior hockey is becoming the beginning of something bigger: an opportunity to continue playing the game they love while pursuing an education through the American Collegiate Hockey Association.

Eight KJHL graduates have now found homes with ACHA programs, transforming the northern Manitoba Junior B league into an emerging pathway to college hockey.

"The KJ is becoming a feeder system for the ACHA in the U.S.," said KJHL president Marcel Fontaine. "Right now, I've counted eight guys playing in that league."

It is an impressive development for a five-team circuit preparing to begin its 2026-27 season. It also provides the league with a powerful recruiting message: Play in the KJHL and your hockey career might not end when your junior eligibility does.

The ACHA was once commonly dismissed as "club hockey," but it has grown far beyond glorified intramurals. Founded in 1991, the organization oversees non-NCAA collegiate hockey throughout the United States.

Today, the ACHA includes more than 461 college- and university-affiliated teams representing 48 states and two Canadian provinces. Approximately 15,000 players and coaches participate in an organization that emphasizes competitive hockey, academics and personal development.

For KJHL graduates, it represents an opportunity to keep playing meaningful hockey while working toward a degree.



OCN'S DREW PETERS FIGHTS FOR THE PUCK WITH CROSS LAKE'S OUTSTANDING WILF MCLEOD. PETERS IS OFF TO SAULT COLLEGE THIS SEASON



XZAVIER KUBLUITOK OF RANKIN INLET AND THE OCN STORM TOOK THAT KJHL CHAMPIONSHIP AND TURNED IT INTO A COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP



CEDRIC PUFFALT, NIAGARA UNIVERSITY



THERON MCGREGOR, LAKE REGION STATE

Few players embody that opportunity better than former OCN Storm captain Chavez Constant.

The Opaskwayak Cree Nation product is entering his fourth and final year at the University of Providence in Great Falls, Montana, where he plays ACHA hockey while pursuing degrees in Sports Management and Criminal Justice.

Long before leaving home for college, Constant had already established himself as much more than a hockey player.

While captaining the Storm, he worked full-time as an educational assistant at Oscar Lathlin Collegiate. He also volunteered with minor hockey, attended community events and continually encouraged young people to put education first.

Now a proud father of twin girls, Constant continues to demonstrate what can be achieved through hard work, commitment and determination. His journey offers young Northern Manitoba athletes tangible evidence that hockey and education can work together to open doors far beyond their home communities.

More KJHL players are following.

Cedric Puffalt, another OCN Storm graduate, has accepted an opportunity to play at Niagara University. Puffalt completed high school in May 2026 and has been taking childhood education courses online through Robertson College while continuing to train.



CHAVEZ CONSTANT, SENIOR AT UNIVERSITY OF PROVIDENCE IN GREAT FALLS, MONTANA



ETHAN CHURCH, LAKE REGION STATE



BLAINE DORION, LAKE SUPERIOR STATE

"Ultimately, I want to be a gym teacher, but I also want to play college hockey - doesn't matter if it's in Canada or the United States - and get my education degree," Puffalt said before accepting Niagara's offer. "It seems like a great opportunity to continue playing hockey while I get a degree."

Meanwhile, Lake Region State College in Devils Lake, North Dakota, has become a particularly popular destination for KJHL alumni.

Harlan Jacobson of Cranberry Portage, a former member of the OCN Storm and PBCN Selects, is heading to Lake Region after spending the 2024-25 campaign with North Vancouver in the Pacific International Junior Hockey League and the 2025-26 season with Lac La Biche in the Alberta Elite Junior Hockey League and Hudson Bay in the Wheatland Senior Hockey League.

At Lake Region, Jacobson will join three more former KJHL players: Xzavier Kubluitok and Ethan Church of the Storm, and Theron McGregor of the Selects.

Blaine Dorion, another OCN graduate, is at Lake Superior State, while prolific former Storm scorer Drew Peters accepted an ACHA scholarship offer from Sault College in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. Peters can pursue his education and play ACHA hockey while remaining in Canada.

The eight graduates also illustrate the success of the OCN Storm program, which produced Constant, Puffalt, Kubluitok, Church, Dorion, Jacobson and Peters.

Fontaine believes the KJHL offers another important advantage to prospective players: affordability.

Communities take care of players who must leave home to join their teams. Unlike some programs that require families to pay thousands of dollars in fees and billet costs, the KJHL works to remove those financial barriers.

"If it's not a local, town player, they don't have to pay any money to come and play in the KJHL," Fontaine said. "They don't have to worry about billet money and stuff like that."

That combination - accessible junior hockey and an expanding route to post-secondary opportunities - could help the KJHL attract more players and communities.

The league will operate with five teams again this season, but expansion discussions are continuing. Sagkeeng First Nation and Pine Creek, communities that previously had Junior B teams, have expressed interest.

Fontaine hopes the league can add two clubs for the 2027-28 season.

The KJHL's growing ACHA connection should only strengthen that expansion pitch. The league is no longer simply providing young players with somewhere to play junior hockey close to home. It is helping them discover somewhere to go next.

For eight KJHL graduates - and perhaps many more to come - the final horn has not ended the dream.

It has sent them to college.

KJHL GRADS IN THE ACHA

Cedric Puffalt *(OCN Storm)*	**Niagara University**
Harlan Jacobson *(OCN Storm/PBCN Selects)*	**Lake Region State**
Xzavier Kubluitok *(OCN Storm)*	**Lake Region State**
Ethan Church *(OCN Storm)*	**Lake Region State**
Theron McGregor *(PBCN Selects)*	**Lake Region State**
Chavez Constant *(OCN Storm)*	**University of Providence**
Blaine Dorion *(OCN Storm)*	**Lake Superior State**
Drew Peters *(OCN Storm)*	**Sault College**



FROM LEFT, ACOYEN FEHR, HAIDEN FRIESEN AND COACH CHRIS UNGER

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy of James Carey Lauder, the Thunder Bay North Stars and Manitoba AAA U18

COMING HOME



Sometimes the best move in hockey is the one that takes you right back where you started. Acoyen Fehr and Haiden Friesen left southern Manitoba in search of Junior 'A' hockey, bigger opportunities and the experience that comes with packing a bag and chasing the game away from home. Now they're back. And for the Pembina Valley Twisters, their return might be every bit as important as their departure was to their development.

Fehr, 20, and Friesen, 19, have joined the Twisters of the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League after spending last season in the Superior International Junior Hockey League. They return as older, more experienced players who have already demonstrated they can perform at a higher level.

For Twisters head coach Chris Unger, landing both is a significant addition to a club looking to continue its climb.

"Them deciding to come back to play for us has really improved the overall outlook for the team amongst the players," Unger said. "I can sense the excitement around the season, just because we have managed to land some quality guys from higher levels that have decided to come back and play for us. "They will make us much more competitive."

Fehr certainly arrives with an impressive resume. The Morden product had 15 goals and 40 points in 38 regular-season games with the Thunder Bay North Stars last season, then added three goals and 13 points in 16 playoff games as the North Stars captured the SIJHL championship.

He went all the way to the Centennial Cup before deciding it was time for a change. Or, more accurately, time to come home.

"I just felt like it was the right time," Fehr said. "I had my fun out there, and I was just ready to come home, go to school and play a little closer to home."

Fehr has enrolled at the University of Manitoba, where he is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree and is considering a future as a French teacher.

Meanwhile, he can continue playing high-level junior hockey with some very familiar faces.

Fehr grew up playing minor hockey in Morden, beginning almost as soon as he could walk. He later played high school hockey before moving into AAA and eventually Junior A. His hockey journey took him through Virden before he was traded to Thunder Bay. Now, with the Twisters, he has been reunited with old friends and former teammates including Josh Guilford and Darby Olsen.

"A little blast from the past," Fehr said. "It's kind of fun coming home to play with your buddies."

Coach Unger believes Fehr will bring considerably more than offence.

"He's come in with just a very, very positive attitude and wanting to bring a positive air to the team," the coach said. "I really see him as being a leader both on the ice and off the ice."

Friesen's road home was a little different. The 19-year-old spent last season with the Dryden Ice Dogs, producing six goals and 15 points in 41 games during his first Junior A campaign. His original objective this fall was to make the Winkler Flyers. Unger encouraged him to pursue it.

"We want these kids to play at the highest level they possibly can," Unger said.

Friesen remained with Winkler deep into camp before being released. He could have returned to Dryden, and Unger said there was also interest from another Junior A team in Manitoba. Instead, Friesen finished camp with Pembina Valley. Then he stayed.

"I kind of weighed out my options and thought this was best for me," Friesen said. "I could do more things at once."

For Friesen, that means hockey and life on the family farm northeast of Winkler, where the family raises approximately 500 cattle and also grows grain.

"I'm working right now full time on the farm," he said, adding that furthering his education is also something he is considering. And unlike Fehr, who has two seasons of MMJHL eligibility remaining, Friesen could be a Twister for three years.

"I'm hoping we can stick with a good group of guys for all those years and just continue to get better every single year," he said.

He already knows many of his new teammates, having either played with them or against them while growing up in southern Manitoba. And Unger expects him to make an immediate impact.

"He's a goal scorer," Unger said. "We anticipate that he'll really lead our charge on the power play, even strength, when it comes to goal scoring."

That is precisely what makes the arrival of Fehr and Friesen so intriguing.

Junior hockey is usually built around players leaving home - leaving family, friends and familiar rinks in pursuit of another level. These two did that. They travelled the Junior 'A' road, lived away from home and discovered what hockey looked like outside the Valley. Fehr even returned with a championship.

Now they have chosen to bring all that experience back with them.

They can attend university, work on the family farm, reconnect with old teammates and still play competitive junior hockey. And for the Pembina Valley Twisters, two young men coming home could help take the entire team to a new place.



HAIDEN FRIESEN

ACOYEN FEHR

THREE-TIME MMJHL CHAMPION

PEMBINA VALLEY TWISTERS

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



BIGWAY FOODS

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



The Minuk Family

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
MANNY JR., LEVI, LEXI, MANNY SR.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

BY CARTER BROOKS
Photos courtesy of Dave Willson, Merlin Heppner, Manny Minuk and the River East Royal Knights

For Manny Minuk, the River East Royal Knights were once simply a hockey team he played for. Twenty-five years later, they have become something considerably more.

Minuk won a championship with the Knights in 2001 and returned for another season afterward. Long after his playing days ended, reminders of those years remained around the family home - memorabilia that his four kids grew up seeing without necessarily realizing just how intertwined their own lives would eventually become with the same organization.

"I always was exposed to that," Manny Jr. said. "Same as my brother, from a long time. So it's been a while. I grew up around the idea of the Knights."

Today, the connection stretches throughout the Minuk family. Manny Sr. is the owner, general manager and head coach. Manny Jr., a former Knights goaltender, is on his father's coaching staff. Eighteen-year-old Levi, a defenceman, is looking to become the latest Minuk to pull on the Knights sweater. Even mom is getting involved, helping with admissions on game nights. It has turned the Knights into a genuine family affair.

For Manny Jr., getting there wasn't necessarily straightforward. He grew up playing in the River East system with the Marauders and Kodiaks, but his Grade 12 season was wiped out by COVID-19. The following year, he was released by the Knights and spent time playing for Selkirk in the CRJHL.

Eventually, he made his way back. He spent his final three years of junior hockey with the Knights, becoming, according to his father, a favourite among teammates because of his leadership in the dressing room.

"Funny kid, witty kid," Manny Sr. said. "Loves hockey as much as anybody I know. Has a total brilliant mind for it."

That hockey mind made the next step a natural one. After aging out, Manny Jr. was asked to join the coaching staff. At the time, he had no idea his father would soon be joining him.

When Manny Sr. eventually received a text asking if he wanted to coach the Knights, he initially thought there had been a mix-up. Manny Jr. had already been discussing coaching with the organization and, considering father and son share the same name, Sr. figured the message must have been intended for his son.

It wasn't.

When he learned the offer really was his, Manny Jr. didn't need much convincing. "I said, 'Man, you have to do it,'" he recalled. "'You have a chance to coach your son.'" The result was a new experience for both.

Manny Sr. had coaching experience, but not at that level or age group. Jr., meanwhile, was learning how to coach alongside his father and friend Anthony Jacob. That doesn't mean father and son always see the game the same way.

"I agree more with Anthony on a daily basis than I do with my own dad," Jr. joked. "We go at it sometimes, but nothing crazy."



LEVI MINUK



FORMER HEAD COACH, GENERAL MANAGER AND OWNER BARRY BONNI



MANNY MINUK JR. FOLLOWING HIS FINAL MMJHL GAME WITH PARENTS MANNY AND LEXI

Those differing perspectives may also be part of what makes the arrangement work. Manny Sr. was a forward who admits the defensive side of hockey wasn't exactly what he relished during his playing days. Manny Jr., naturally, sees things differently.

"He's very defensive-minded, obviously he's a goalie," Sr. said. "So he really teaches that structure and believes in that structure."

And now another Minuk is entering the equation. Levi followed a similar River East path, playing for the Marauders and spending two seasons with the Kodiaks before arriving at Knights camp. At 18, the defenceman could potentially spend four seasons with the club.

The Knights connection isn't entirely new for him, either. Levi had the opportunity to affiliate with the club for a game during Manny Jr.'s final season, briefly giving the brothers a chance to wear the same colours.

"My dad and brother were always proud Royal Knights who set high standards for me," Levi said. "It's awesome to get the opportunity to put on the same colours as them."

For his dad, there's some humour in how the family's positions have worked out. Manny Sr. was a goal-scoring forward, yet somehow his two sons ended up at the opposite end of the positional spectrum.

"I was a forward, I got a goalie and a defenceman," Manny Sr. laughed, recalling Barry Bonni joking that he wasn't sure the two were actually his kids.

Should Levi earn his place in the lineup, however, his last name won't earn him any shortcuts. Manny Jr. insists his younger brother will be treated like anybody else, although the older sibling in him hasn't completely disappeared.

"We've treated him like any other player," Manny Jr. said. "He has to earn every minute he gets. I can't wait to sit him, to be honest with you," Jr. joked. "We might health bomb him first game just to send a message."

Levi has his own memories of that brotherly relationship and isn't about to let his new coach get away without a shot in return.

"Having my brother who used to beat the snot out of me as a coach can be interesting," he joked. "But he's great, and keeps it professional at the rink."

Having Dad behind the bench isn't entirely unfamiliar, either. Manny Sr. coached Levi when he was first learning how to skate and later helped coach one of his teams to a championship, giving the younger Minuk plenty of confidence in what his father can eventually accomplish with the Knights.

"I have no doubt he will be able to do the same with the Knights one day," Levi said.

Behind the jokes, though, is an opportunity the family understands doesn't come around very often. A father coaching alongside one son while another plays in front of them. A mother helping welcome people into the rink. And a team that has somehow remained part of the family's story for a quarter-century.

For Levi, joining that history doesn't mean simply following in the footsteps of his dad and older brother.

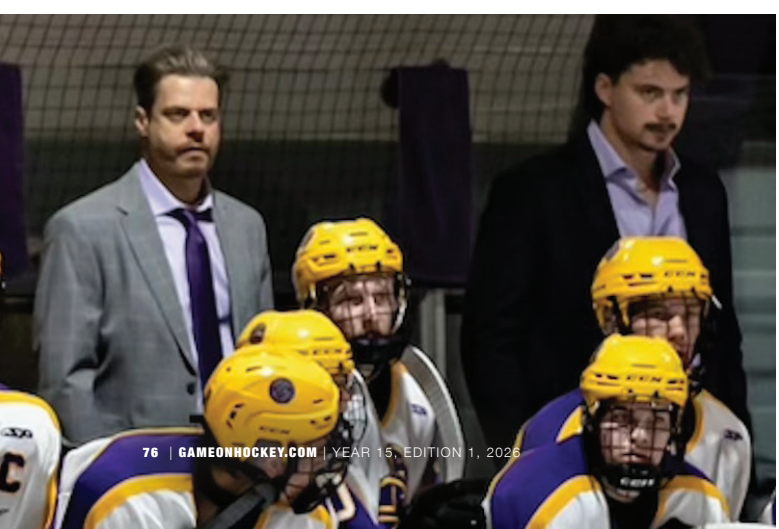
"I think it's a great thing to be associated with our family," he said. "I'll be proud to have that connection while also creating my own place with the team."

For all the different roles they now occupy, the Minuks still have lives away from the rink. Manny Jr. has his nine-to-five. So does his dad. Then the workday ends. They head to Terry Sawchuk Arena, where Manny Sr. coaches, Manny Jr. joins him behind the bench, Levi takes his place among the players and mom helps out around the rink.

To Manny Jr., that is exactly what junior hockey at this level is supposed to look like.

"It's kind of what the MM's all about - community, family, dedicated hockey players who are dedicated, but also still living their lives on a day-to-day basis," he said.

Twenty-five years after Manny Minuk first wore a River East sweater, Knights hockey is still very much in the family.



MANNY MINUK AND ANTHONY JACOB BEHIND THE BENCH



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CODY FARRELL

MAKING AN IMPACT

BY PAUL EDMONDS

Photos courtesy of Keith Herschmiller, the Humboldt Broncos and the Winnipeg Wild

His coach called it a breakout season, and the numbers would back that up.

But there was nothing providential about the year Cody Farrell fashioned in his final season of minor hockey.

As a 17-year-old major with the U18 AAA Winnipeg Wild, Farrell was dialled-in early and produced a campaign that everyone around him knew was a possibility.

The result was a scoring title in the Manitoba U18 Hockey League (MU18HL), leading both in goals (43) and points (95) and pacing his team to a second-place regular season finish in the 13-team league standings.

It was a quantum leap in offence for the second-year forward, a jump so steep it might have seemed impossible if it didn't actually happen, especially considering Farrell produced just 13 goals and 28 points in a similar number of games the year prior.

"It's difficult to lead the U18 provincial league in points for any player," said U18 Wild head coach Paul Krueger. "The growth that Cody showed between the two seasons was a significant step."

That stride wasn't just limited to finding the back of the net. In fact, it was an improvement in his all-around game, particularly in his own zone. And as the hockey credo suggests, good defence leads to good offence.

"He changed the way he played," added Krueger. "We talked a lot about his size and to use that more to protect pucks and take it to the net."

For the six-foot-three, 205-pound Farrell, the process to alter his game started in between his two U18 seasons, where he and Krueger engaged in many conversations about areas of growth and improvement.

Farrell clearly bought in.

"He was trying to figure out what kind of player he could be," said Krueger. "He was open to coaching and instruction and took it all in. He became a much better two-way player."



CODY FINDS THE NET AT REGINA PATS TRAINING CAMP

As a result of his dedication to improving, ability to integrate suggestions into his game and certainly the season he produced, Farrell was selected as the 2025-2026 Winnipeg AAA Council Impact Player of the Year - a prestigious award presented annually to the top player among all 12 teams under the Winnipeg AAA hockey umbrella.

"Last season definitely exceeded my expectations," said Farrell, who graduated from St. Paul's High School last June. "I always believed I could lead the league in points, but I don't know if I truly expected to do it last year."

In winning the Impact Player of the Year, Farrell becomes the third Wild player in the last four years to capture the honour and the second straight in the U18 age category.

Previously, Carter Kingerski (U15, 2022-23) and Ludovic Perreault (U18, 2024-25) were also presented with the award; not surprising both are former teammates of Farrell's.

As such, the distinction of being Winnipeg AAA hockey's most impactful player is not lost on the Charleswood resident.

"The history of those players winning the Impact Player of the Year is special," said Farrell, now 18. "It's the best of the best. To win that award means a lot and there's a real recognition to it for being a good hockey player."

According to Krueger it was an easy choice, especially given the trajectory in Farrell's game last season and his ability to make those around him more successful as well.

"When he figured it out everything started to come together, and that's why he ended up being the player he was last year and that was certainly recognized with the award," said Krueger, who just completed his 24th season behind the U18 Wild bench.

> **"LAST SEASON DEFINITELY EXCEEDED MY EXPECTATIONS."**
>
> **– CODY FARRELL**

"A lot of that was hard work and just being a dominant player, especially down low because he started to use his size, skill and ability to create opportunities in that situation."

Despite not wearing a leadership letter on his jersey, Farrell was clearly one of the Wild's principal players, a role and responsibility he knew came with his age, experience and abilities as a five-year Winnipeg AAA player.

"I've always tried to be the leader, but I also felt that I had to earn that," he said. "I measure everything off team success and last year I just wanted to have a good role on our team."

What Krueger witnessed for 56 regular season and playoff games – along with countless practices and team functions – was a player that paced the direction of his team even without any insignia on his jersey lapel.

"Guys looked up to him," said Krueger. "There were

times where guys were in awe of the way he played. And our team really fed off of that."

"He's a great kid. He's sociable. And the guys really liked him as a teammate. They gravitated toward him and a lot of that was through his play."

Now with his minor hockey career completed, Farrell has turned his attention to advancing in the game.

He maintains "big time" aspirations to play in the Western Hockey League, perhaps as soon as later this season, but for right now has settled in at the Junior 'A' level with the Humboldt Broncos of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League.

It's a level of hockey he believes he's well prepared for after last year's achievements.

"Last season was everything for me," he said. "It shaped me into the player that I am in playing junior hockey today."

Beyond that, playing professionally is also on his radar – an objective he also holds with high ambition.

"I would love it to be my job," Farrell said.

And with three quick years of Junior eligibility remaining, it might not be very far away from becoming a reality, something Krueger definitely sees happening for his now former player.

"The NHL is a dream that every kid aspires to," he said. "But I think Cody understands the difficulty of getting to that level.

"It's a tough sled, but if he continues on his path there's no reason why he can't play pro hockey."

If so, prepare for another breakout season there, too.



CODY POSING WITH A YOUNG FAN POST-GAME WITH THE BRONCOS_

Hockey Winnipeg Council

WINNIPEG AAA HOCKEY AWARD WINNERS

2025-26 SEASON

AAA TOP FORWARD
U15 Koen Braunberger (Bruins Black)
U17 Will Owens (Bruins)
U18 Crewe Schimnowski (Bruins)

AAA TOP DEFENCEMAN
U15 Drew Simpson (Thrashers Blue)
U17 William Sedleski (Thrashers)
U18 Connor Zuk (Wild)

AAA TOP GOALTENDER
U15 Champ Vannus (Thrashers Blue)
U17 Zachary Houtkooper (Bruins)
U18 Logan German (Bruins)

HARDEST WORKING PLAYER
U15 Greyson Urquhart (Bruins Black)
U17 Cristian Vieira (Wild)
U18 Jack Ross (Wild)

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER
U15 Koen Braunberger (Bruins Black)
U17 Joel Vermette (Bruins)
U18 Crewe Schimnowski (Bruins)

U18 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS
Joshua Shaganya (Winnipeg Bruins)
Nolan Giles (Winnipeg Thrashers)
Jack Ross (Winnipeg Wild)

AAA IMPACT PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Cody Farrell (Winnipeg U18 Wild)

AAA COACH OF THE YEAR
Larry Woo (Winnipeg U18 Bruins)



THE BLAZERS LEADERSHIP GROUP, FROM LEFT LUCY RING, BRANNAGH RAE, LYDIA HILL, CAPTAIN ÉMILIE BONIN AND JAKIAH CURLE

LEADERSHIP

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by James Carey Lauder

THE BALMORAL HALL BLAZERS HAVE PUT THEIR FAITH INTO FIVE LEADERS THIS SEASON. HEAD COACH MAGGIE LITCHFIELD-MEDD HAS ASSEMBLED A SMART, THOUGHTFUL GROUP TO LEAD THE BLAZERS INTO THE 2026-27 CANADIAN SPORT SCHOOL HOCKEY LEAGUE CAMPAIGN.



There are captains who lead with speeches. There are captains who lead with noise. And then there is Balmoral Hall Blazers captain Emilie Bonin. She just shows up. Every day. Every practice. Every game. Every meeting. Steady. Thoughtful. Prepared. Consistent.

And for head coach Maggie Litchfield-Medd, that might be the best kind of captain a hockey team could possibly have.

"Our captain, Emilie Bonin, is just steady Eddie in every sense of it," Litchfield-Medd said. "She's so consistent. She shows up every day. She's also very thoughtful and inclusive with the group."

For the 2026-27 season, the Blazers have put together a five-player leadership group that Litchfield-Medd believes represents virtually everything she wants her hockey program to be.

Bonin, a 5-foot-9 Grade 11 defender from Winnipeg, will wear the 'C'. Jakiah Curle and Lucy Ring are alternate captains, while Grade 11s Brannagh Rae and Lydia Hill will share another 'A', with one wearing it at home and the other on the road.

It is a group featuring different personalities and different leadership styles. And that is precisely the point.

"We're excited about the group," Litchfield-Medd said. "It's a leadership group of five. A good mix of Grade 12s and some strong Grade 11s."

Bonin's journey to the captaincy has been anything but conventional. She started playing hockey when she was four, inspired by her older brother, and played boys hockey until Grade 9. She then joined the program at St. Mary's Academy.



ÉMILIE BONIN

When that program shut down, Bonin moved to Balmoral Hall before last season. One year later, she's captain of the Blazers.

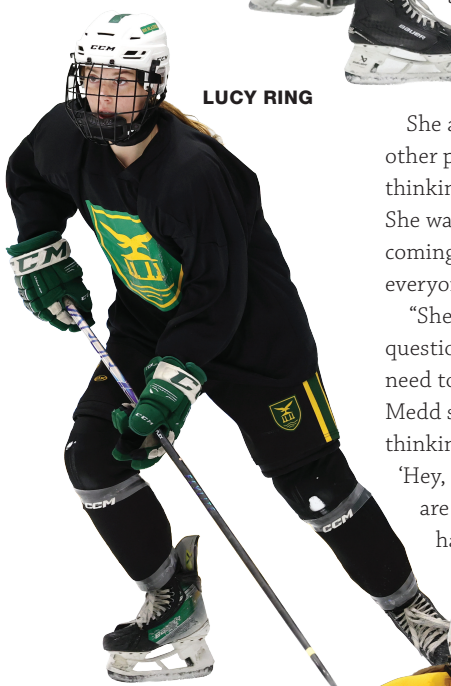
"Yeah, it really is," Bonin said, when asked if earning the captaincy was a big deal.

Still, she doesn't envision the 'C' changing who she is or suddenly turning her into the loudest voice in the dressing room. Quite the opposite.

That answer probably explains as well as anything why Bonin has the letter in the first place. She sees leadership as service rather than status. Litchfield-Medd sees the same thing.

Bonin is the player who thinks ahead. She asks the questions other players might be thinking but haven't asked. She wants to know what is coming next and whether everyone is prepared for it.

"She's always asking questions to the coaches that need to be asked," Litchfield-Medd said. "Just always thinking about the next thing. 'Hey, the game on Friday, are we doing this?' She has been proactive in a lot of that. She's been a great leader so far."



LUCY RING

"Our team is really tight-knit, so I feel like it won't be that much of needing to control everyone," she said. "It's more just keeping everyone in place and making sure our team gets along and does well."



JAKIAH CURLE

And Bonin has some considerable plans beyond Balmoral Hall. She wants to continue playing hockey at university while studying medicine. For now, however, her job is helping lead a Blazers team that has assembled a remarkably diverse group around her.

Jakiah Curle brings another dimension. A power forward who can move the puck, she earned the respect of teammates because of her willingness to put the team ahead of herself.

"Just her kind of lead-by-example, and then also just how much effort she puts into the team," Litchfield-Medd said. "I think that's been showcased, and the girls who voted for her saw that."

Lucy Ring, meanwhile, brings organization. Every successful hockey team has players who make sure the little things actually happen - that everybody is ready, everybody knows where they need to be and newcomers feel like they belong. That's Lucy Ring.

"She's the team organizer, making sure girls are getting ready for warm-ups, her own discipline helps prepare the team each game," said Litchfield-Medd. "Just making sure that we're doing the things day-in, day-out."

That role became particularly valuable with a large group of new players arriving at Balmoral Hall. The coach noticed that Ring helped make the transition easier.

"We had a lot of new girls come in and she was able to kind of help manage, bring them in and assimilate them into the group," Litchfield-Medd said.

Then there are the two Grade 11s sharing a letter.

Lydia Hill might be described as the connector. She talks to everyone. She includes everyone. She also brings some personality to a hockey environment that can become pretty serious over the course of a long season.



LYDIA HILL



BRANNAGH RAE

"Lydia Hill just talks to everyone," Litchfield-Medd said. "Super inclusive, goofy, fun kid."

But there is another side. Once Hill gets on the ice, the fun-loving teammate becomes a player determined to improve.

"She's eager to learn, wants to get better and wants to do really, really well," Litchfield-Medd said. "I think that just, again, it ties into the off-ice, on-ice component that we have there."

Brannagh Rae supplies yet another ingredient: work. And lots of it.

"Brannagh is just a workhorse on and off the ice," Litchfield-Medd said. "She is pushing people to be better in the gym or on the ice."

So, the Blazers have five players - five personalities - wearing letters. It all amounts to five different ways of leading. For Litchfield-Medd, that is the beauty of this particular group.

Balmoral Hall doesn't need five Emilie Bonins or five Brannagh Raes. It needs Bonin's consistency, Curle's selflessness, Ring's organization, Hill's inclusiveness and Rae's relentless work ethic. Put them together and the Blazers believe they have a leadership group capable of setting the standard for an entire hockey program.

"I'm really excited about the whole leadership group," Litchfield-Medd said. "I think we have a very good system there that's going to help drive the team this season."

And perhaps that is the most important word. Drive. The letters, 'A' and 'C', might be stitched onto five sweaters, but the idea is to have the entire Blazers dressing room following their lead.

THE FWSSC: GETTING BIGGER

For four days in November, some of the best young female hockey players in Western Canada will have the same destination - Winnipeg. And Balmoral Hall intends to make sure there is plenty waiting for them when they arrive.

The Blazers will play host to the second annual Female World Sport School Challenge, Nov. 12-15 at the hockey for all centre, and the 2026 version has grown into a 16-team showcase.

"It's bigger than last year," said Blazers head coach Maggie Litchfield-Medd.

The Hockey Canada-sanctioned tournament will feature the host Blazers along with RINK Hockey Academy Winnipeg, Thompson Okanagan Lakers, Winnipeg Avros, OHA Black, Central Plains Capitals, Battlefords WPD Ambulance Sharks, Notre Dame Hounds, Westman Wildcats, Regina Rebels, Pilot Mound Buffaloes, Winnipeg Ice, Northern Capitals, Interlake Lightning, Yellowhead Chiefs and Weyburn Gold Wings.

"We're very excited to have teams from all across Western Canada going all the way to the coast," Litchfield-Medd said. "There are going to be a bunch of exciting games."

Of course, the weekend will include more than just hockey competition. Balmoral Hall Family Night is scheduled for Friday at 6:30 p.m., while a skills competition will be held Saturday at 6:30 p.m., hosted by Dream Hockey's Chelsea Dinnin.

There will also be another audience watching closely.

Balmoral Hall will be hosting university scouts, both in person and through online broadcasts - an increasingly important recruiting tool when university teams are in the middle of their own seasons.

"It's an easy way to watch the girls and not have to add a flight ticket to your budget, too," Litchfield-Medd said.

Sixteen teams. Four days. One building. And an opportunity for some of Western Canada's top young female players to put their skills on display.



A COACH'S LIFE

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos courtesy Hockey Manitoba, Brandon University, Hockey Hall of Fame, Hockey Canada

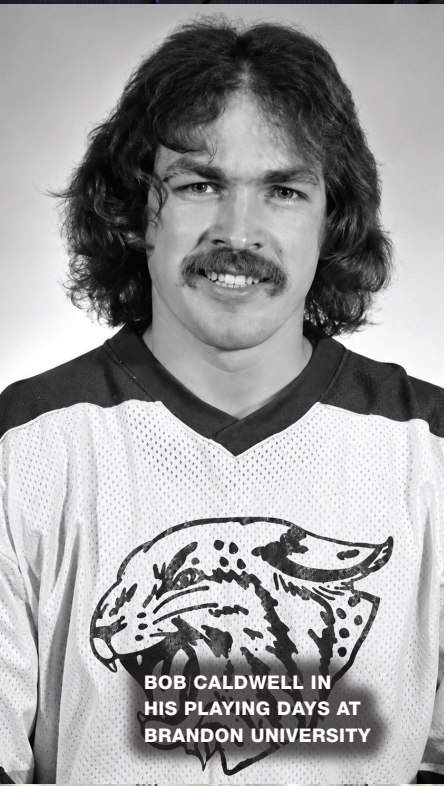
DELORAINE'S BOB CALDWELL, EVEN AFTER 25 YEARS AS HOCKEY MANITOBA'S MASTER MENTOR, IS A TEACHER WHO NEVER STOPPED LEARNING. AND AS HE TAKES HIS PLACE IN MANITOBA'S HOCKEY HALL OF FAME, THERE APPEARS TO BE A LOT OF LEARNING LEFT.



COACH BOB CALDWELL



COACH CALDWELL AT WESTERN MICHIGAN



BOB CALDWELL IN HIS PLAYING DAYS AT BRANDON UNIVERSITY



BOB'S LONGTIME FRIEND AND COACHING PARTNER, HOCKEY MANITOBA'S DIRECTOR OF HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT BERNIE REICHARDT

Bob Caldwell has spent most of his life teaching hockey. At 74, he's still taking lessons. Four or five times a week, you can find him on the ice in Hartney or Deloraine, working with young players, helping with his grandsons' teams, running skills sessions and doing what he has done for more than half a century - watching, listening, learning and then finding a better way to teach the game.

That might explain why, on October 3, Caldwell was inducted into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame as a Builder. It also explains why the honour makes him a little uncomfortable.

"I was a pretty average player," Caldwell said with a laugh. "But I guess I found a bit of a passion with development. I like teaching and kind of combining teaching and hockey to maybe come up with these plans... But yeah, it's pretty special."

Pretty special hardly begins to describe Caldwell's hockey life. He has coached everyone from six-year-olds to NCAA Division I players. He has worked with Hockey Canada's national Under-17 program, coached Poland's Under-18 national team, mentored coaches in Romania and Finland, worked with the International Ice Hockey Federation and spent a season as an assistant coach alongside his longtime friend and mentor Andy Murray at Western Michigan University.

He helped drive the creation of Hockey Canada's National Coach Mentorship Program and spent more than 25 years as Hockey Manitoba's Master Mentor, developing programs, clinics and resources that have influenced thousands of coaches and, through them, generations of young players.

And somehow, through all of it, Caldwell never really left Deloraine. His hockey story actually began in Hamiota before taking a rather unconventional route to Brandon University.

"I was a highly recruited athlete at BU," Caldwell deadpanned. "I walked on."

After three years at the University of Manitoba, where he earned an arts degree and played intramural hockey, the small-town kid decided the big university wasn't quite for him. He transferred to Brandon University and went to a couple of Bobcats practices, mainly to get some ice time before his hometown team started playing.

He made the team.

"My scholarship, I got $35 for a pair of Tacks skates," he laughed. "That was my total scholarship."

Caldwell played two seasons with the Bobcats and helped Brandon win consecutive Great Plains Athletic Conference championships in 1973-74 and 1974-75. Then he headed to Deloraine in 1975 to teach high school history and world affairs. He figured he might stay a couple of years. He stayed 35.

His coaching career started almost immediately, courtesy of one of those wonderfully Manitoba hockey moments. Caldwell had barely arrived in town when he attended a local social and encountered the legendary Doc Bonar.

"He says, 'You Caldwell, the new history teacher?' And I said, 'Yeah.' And he says, 'Well, you'll be coaching the Midget team.' "So, I coached the Midget team."

There apparently was no application process.

"There was no question about whether I was or wasn't," Caldwell laughed. "That was it."

His first formal coaching clinic had already provided a hint that this might not be an ordinary coaching career. It was in Moscow.

In 1975, Concordia University sponsored a trip that took Canadian coaches to the Soviet Union for two weeks. Caldwell went along and returned to Manitoba with ideas he could apply to his own coaching. He never really stopped looking for more.

Eventually he coached his son Ryan from U7 through much of minor hockey. Today, he helps coach two grandsons, one in U13 and another in U15. Years ago, one of those grandchildren even became Caldwell's teacher. While watching his then-four-year-old grandson skate, Caldwell stopped instructing and simply observed how the youngster moved. He watched his edges, his body position and the natural process by which a child figured things out.

The experience eventually became a Hockey Manitoba presentation called What My Grandson Taught Me About Skating. It was pure Caldwell.

"My wife always says, 'When are you going to know it all?'" he said. "I said, 'I'll never know.'"

That curiosity became enormously important to Hockey Manitoba. Caldwell became involved with the provincial organization in the mid-1990s and eventually formed a remarkable partnership with Director of Hockey Development Bernie Reichardt. They shared a basic philosophy: Give Manitoba

kids and coaches first-rate development opportunities without forcing families to spend a fortune or leave their communities to find them.

"Let's see what we can do at home so kids can stay at home, be inclusive, be affordable," Caldwell said.

The result included Hockey Manitoba's Coach Mentorship Program, Made in Manitoba Specialty Clinics and Breakfast Clubs. Caldwell and Reichardt developed clinics on skating, checking, defencemen, small-area games and other subjects. They travelled to communities rather than demanding coaches travel to them. They created presentations and even produced five instructional DVDs. And they gave the material away.

"The specialty clinics were free to the coaches and the DVDs were free," Caldwell said. In Deloraine, Caldwell spearheaded a Breakfast Club that combined skill development with something equally important - breakfast. Youngsters would hit the ice early in the morning, work on basic skills, eat together and then head off to school. The idea spread across Manitoba and eventually beyond the province and Canada.

For Reichardt, though, Caldwell's greatest contribution has never been a program, clinic or DVD. It's Bob Caldwell.

"He's just the selfless guy," Reichardt said. "He's the type of guy that, if someone needs something, he just says, 'Yeah, what do you need?' "I think the fact that he's a teacher really helps, because he has a good way of working with people and approaching people."

Reichardt first met Caldwell in Deloraine in the late 1990s. He had been sent there to discuss a development program. It didn't take long for him to realize he had stumbled upon somebody extraordinary.

"I just started talking to him and I'm kind of going, 'Does this guy ever know 100 times more than I'll ever know about the game of hockey?'" Reichardt recalled.

A few years later, the two attended the first national Coach Mentor seminar in Orangeville, Ont. Caldwell became Manitoba's Master Mentor Coach. They were virtually inseparable for the next quarter-century.

"I've been front row with him for a quarter century, and he's my coach-mentor," Reichardt said. "I've told him that and he just said, 'Ah, no.' "But he is. I've known a lot of people in my life, and that guy knows as much about hockey as anyone I have ever met."

For all his grassroots work, Caldwell's hockey education eventually carried him around the world. He coached Poland's U18 national team, mentored internationally and worked with the IIHF. Hockey Canada used him in its national U17 program. Then came Murray.

Murray had long been Caldwell's mentor and friend. Caldwell's son Ryan played for Murray at Shattuck-St. Mary's before going on to a 14-year professional career. Caldwell believes that single season with Murray might have been the most important development year of his son's career.

Then Murray did something similar for Dad. In August 2012, Murray suddenly needed an assistant at Western Michigan. "You want to coach?" Murray asked him. "Where?" "Western Michigan." Within weeks, Caldwell was in Kalamazoo.

For a man obsessed with learning, it was hockey graduate school.

"He picked me up at about 10 to seven every morning and I might get home at nine, I might get home at six," Caldwell said. "Andy's successful for a reason. He works amazingly hard."

Murray also reinforced a philosophy Caldwell carried home: Treat people properly. Caldwell once asked Murray how coaching midget players differed from coaching professionals.

"There is no difference at all," Murray told him. Same expectations. Same respect. It became another lesson Caldwell passed along.

"Bob wants to make the game better," Reichardt said. "He seeks no recognition, he has no hidden agenda, he wants to make hockey better for as many people as he possibly can."

The recognition came anyway. Caldwell was Hockey Manitoba's Volunteer of the Year in 2012. He received Hockey Canada's Gordon Juckes Award in 2015, and that year Hockey Manitoba established an annual scholarship in his name. He entered the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame as a member of the Deloraine Royals in 2015, was inducted into Brandon University's Sports Wall of Fame in 2018 and received Hockey Canada's Outstanding Volunteer Award in 2023.

Now comes his individual place in the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame.

"I really appreciate Peter Woods taking the time to nominate me," Caldwell said modestly.



BOB CALDWELL BEGINS HIS COACHING TENURE WITH PAL ANDY MURRAY AT WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

He recently stepped away from his formal Master Mentor role with Hockey Manitoba after more than 25 years. But retirement? Not quite. There are practices to run. There are grandsons to coach. There are kids in Deloraine who still need somebody to help them find an outside edge. And somewhere in all those practices, Bob Caldwell will undoubtedly discover something he didn't know yesterday. Then the teacher will teach it.

"I think the better I am," Caldwell said, "the better it is for the kids I coach."

After more than 50 years running practices and coaching games, that might be the perfect description of Manitoba Hockey Hall of Famer Bob Caldwell. Still coaching. Still teaching. Still learning.

For more on Hockey Manitoba check out **hockeymanitoba.ca**

MORE THAN A HOCKEY RINK

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by James Carey Lauder

AT ONE OF WINNIPEG'S BUSIEST HOCKEY VENUES, THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SOUTHDALE C.C. IS DETERMINED TO PUT THE "COMMUNITY" BACK IN COMMUNITY CENTRE

There aren't many places in Winnipeg where you can arrive at 6:30 in the morning and already find hockey players on the ice - and then come back 17 hours later and find somebody else still skating.

Welcome to Southdale Community Centre.

This place doesn't sleep much.

In fact, with its ice operating at well over 90 per cent capacity, Southdale has become one of the busiest - and most important - hockey facilities in the city. High school teams, hockey academies, AAA players, community kids and the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League's St. Boniface Riels all make their way through a building where the final group often doesn't get off the ice until after midnight.

But here's the interesting part.

Jamie Bettens, president of Southdale Community Centre, and the members of his hard-working board, don't want Southdale to be known simply as a hockey rink.

Not even close.

"We've had one kind of term or slogan throughout my tenure here, and we will stick to it," Bettens said. "The board and I are trying to put the community back in community centre."

And they mean it.

Southdale is certainly a hockey and ringette powerhouse. More than eight high schools use the facility every week. The AAA Bruins program calls it home. So does the Churchill High School Hockey Academy. The Laker Hockey Academy uses the facility, while the Riels can bring terrific crowds into the building. Southdale's learn-to-skate program is unmatched.

Southdale has also developed a reputation for producing and developing male and female hockey players who are comfortable in an elite environment long before they reach junior hockey.



BETTENS INSIDE THE HOME RINK OF THE BRUINS AND RIELS



SOUTHDALE COMMUNITY CENTRE

I've had WHL scouts who have commented positively about players emerging from the Bruins catchment," Bettens explained, "because they know those young athletes have received not only quality coaching but also experience in a first-rate facility."

Both male and female players begin learning the expectations of an elite hockey environment as early as Grade 7 through the Churchill Hockey Academy.

They learn how to use a proper training venue. They learn how to look after dressing rooms. They learn that certain areas aren't for skate blades. They learn that being an elite athlete includes respecting the building and the people who use it.

"Things that you would see in a professional setting, you're seeing here," Bettens said.

And it isn't limited to AAA stars or future junior players. An 11- or 12-year-old community hockey player gets the same experience. So, too, do the ringette players who call Southdale home.

"We try to operate under, the one thing that we've tried to do as a community centre in the last few years is provide an elite facility," Bettens said. "That means keeping it clean, modern and safe."

Southdale has invested in two new scoreboards and continues to raise money for improvements. Bettens is particularly proud that Southdale is the only venue in Manitoba that operates two electric ice resurfacers, eliminating the exhaust pollution associated with traditional machines. Longtime Manitoba sportsman Bruce Paton also operates a skate sharpening service inside the building. Still, for all the hockey and ringette activity, the Southdale board has been deliberately expanding Southdale's reach.

The centre is developing programming for seniors, underserved groups, Southdale residents and organizations throughout the area. U-Turn Parkinson's has become a long-term tenant, occupying space during weekdays and creating another important connection between the building and Winnipeg's Parkinson's community.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the centre's philosophy than its inclusive change area.

Rather than simply putting up a sign saying everyone is welcome, Southdale built something tangible to prove it.

The area includes private individual change rooms and showers, providing a safe, comfortable option for people who may have physical or mental disabilities, privacy concerns or simply feel uncomfortable in a conventional dressing-room setting.

"The inclusive change area was something that our board had come up with, again, as a piece to make a signal back to the community that we are inclusive," Bettens said. "And it doesn't just result in sport inclusivity, it results in everyone being included."

For Bettens and his board, it comes down to removing barriers.

"If somebody has a physical or mental disability, you can't always see it, but it's there," he said. "They may not want to tell anybody, and that's perfectly fine with us.

"We want them to know that they have a space here that they can utilize to change, to shower, to feel like themselves as much as possible when participating in a public activity."

That philosophy just might be Southdale's greatest achievement. Yes, it remains a hockey factory. Great coaches have passed through the building. Talented players have developed there. High school and Riels' playoff games can turn the place into a madhouse, with packed crowds screaming themselves hoarse.

Bettens loves those nights.

"Southdale should be loud. It should be busy," Bettens said. "It should be filled with hockey players dreaming about the WHL, junior hockey or perhaps something even bigger."

But as the Southdale board knows, it should also be filled with seniors. And community organizations. And people dealing with Parkinson's. And children playing community hockey. And people who once might have wondered whether there was a comfortable place for them inside the building.

Because ultimately, the board isn't trying to build Winnipeg's best hockey rink. It's trying to build one of Winnipeg's best community centres. And at Southdale, there's a big difference.

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St. Boniface Riels

OF THE MANITOBA MAJOR JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE



LUKAS MAGER

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OWEN LAROCQUE

DYLAN BAUKNECHT

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Sept. 27	St. Vital	3:00 p.m.	**Dec. 13**	Stonewall	3:00 p.m.
Sept. 29	Pembina Valley	7:30 p.m.	**Dec. 20**	St. James	3:00 p.m.
Oct. 4	Fort Garry/Fort Rouge	3:00 p.m.	**Jan. 5**	River East	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 9	Raiders	7:30 p.m.	**Jan. 17**	Charleswood	3:00 p.m.
Oct. 16	Transcona	7:30 p.m.	**Jan. 22**	Raiders	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 25	River East	1:45 p.m.	**Jan. 24**	Stonewall	3:00 p.m.
Nov. 1	Charleswood	3:00 p.m.	**Jan. 31**	St. James	3:00 p.m.
Nov. 8	Raiders	3:00 p.m.	**Feb. 9**	Pembina Valley	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 22	St. Vital	3:00 p.m.	**Feb. 21**	Fort Garry/Fort Rouge	3:00 p.m.
Dec. 4	Fort Garry/Fort Rouge	7:30 p.m.	**Feb. 26**	Transcona	7:30 p.m.
Dec. 6	Charleswood	3:00 p.m.	**Feb. 28**	Stonewall	3:00 p.m.

Southdale Community Centre
254 Lakewood Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R2J 3A2

204-257-6171

southdale.ca

HOME OF THE MMJHL'S ST. BONIFACE RIELS

THEY KEEP COMING BACK

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by James Carey Lauder and Scott Taylor

DEVELOPMENT DRAWS PLAYERS TO CHURCHILL HOCKEY ACADEMY. THE PEOPLE, THE FRIENDSHIPS AND THE FEELING THAT THEY BELONG KEEP THEM THERE.

There are plenty of ways to measure the success of a hockey academy.

Count the elite players. Count the AAA players. Count the kids who eventually reach the Western Hockey League. Maybe, one day, count an NHL player or two.

At Churchill Hockey Academy, however, there might be an even better measurement: count the kids who come back.

They come back for Grade 8. They come back for Grade 9. They come back through high school. Some graduate and still wander through the doors at Christmas or after the season just to say hello and get back on the ice. And some even leave - only to discover they miss the place enough to return.

That might explain how a hockey program that began with 28 students roughly a decade ago has grown to about 150 players today.

The secret, according to coach and Collège Churchill High School teacher Matthew Varnes, really isn't much of a secret: Once players experience Churchill Hockey Academy, many simply don't want to leave.

"People coming back, staying, especially like our high school program, passing the word down to their siblings, passing the word down into the community," Varnes said. "All of that stuff just contributes to people wanting to come here and then as soon as they experience it, they don't want to leave."

Granted the hockey certainly matters.

CHA (Churchill Hockey Academy) has developed high-end players, including a dozen players skating in the WHL this season (and maybe one or two in the NHL before the 2026-27 season ends), and its young athletes arrive every morning knowing that getting better is part of the deal.

But Varnes believes CHA's attraction goes well beyond producing elite hockey players.

"The atmosphere, the community, the family, the inclusiveness that is here allows it to be a place for everyone, not just those top guys, those top players," he said.

That might be the real lure of CHA. You don't have to be a future NHL player to feel like you belong. Players arrive from different parts of Winnipeg, play for different community and elite teams and compete against each other at night and on weekends.

Then they come to Collège Churchill High School in the morning, lace up their skates and become teammates again. Coach and teacher Jesse Klym believes that makes the program unique.

Unlike traditional hockey academies where players practice and compete together as a team, CHA is built primarily around individual skill development. Players remain with their own community, AA, AAA or high school teams while receiving additional training through the academy.

That means the player beside you during a morning session might be the opponent trying to take the puck away from you that evening.



1. FROM LEFT, BRADY PIEC, BENTLEY PETERS AND BRAEDEN STEWART



MATT VARNES



JESSE KLYM

"They feel like a little team here," Klym said. "But then when you go and play in your community team, now you're playing against somebody who you're just skating with in the morning."

It creates competition, but it also creates friendships. Just ask Bentley Peters.

Peters is in his third year at Collège Churchill and plays U15 AAA hockey with the Bruins. For him, there is no mystery about why he keeps returning.

"The development and all the good coaches and all my friends go here," Peters said. "I'm a lot better at the sport I love because of CHA."

Then he added perhaps the most important part: "It's very fun. All my friends, just hanging out with them, it makes it way better."

That theme comes up repeatedly and Braeden Stewart might be the perfect example.

Stewart arrived at Collège Churchill in Grade 8. He is now entering Grade 12. That's five years. Five years of classes. Five years of practices. Five years of arriving at the rink and pulling on the gear. And five years later, he still talks about the place like a kid who just discovered it.

"The team environment is great," Stewart said. "The coaches are awesome, and they keep pushing me to come back every year. And it's lots of fun."

For Stewart, who plans on attending the University of Manitoba next fall, hockey has become part of the rhythm of the school day.

"Coming to the rink every day, having a smile on my face, going on the ice," he said. "It's a good way to wake me up. I have a class in the morning, come straight here, and it's great. I'm awake, ready to go, and it's great for my development as a player."

He also plays for Collège Churchill's high school team, meaning academy sessions give many of those players another opportunity to work together.

But Stewart understands something else about Collège Churchill.



MAYA GROSNEY



AIDEN KENNEDY

With roughly 800 students at the school and about 150 involved in the academy, hockey players represent a significant part of the student population.

"Everybody knows everybody," he said. "Even if we're not on the same team... we just like hanging out with each other."

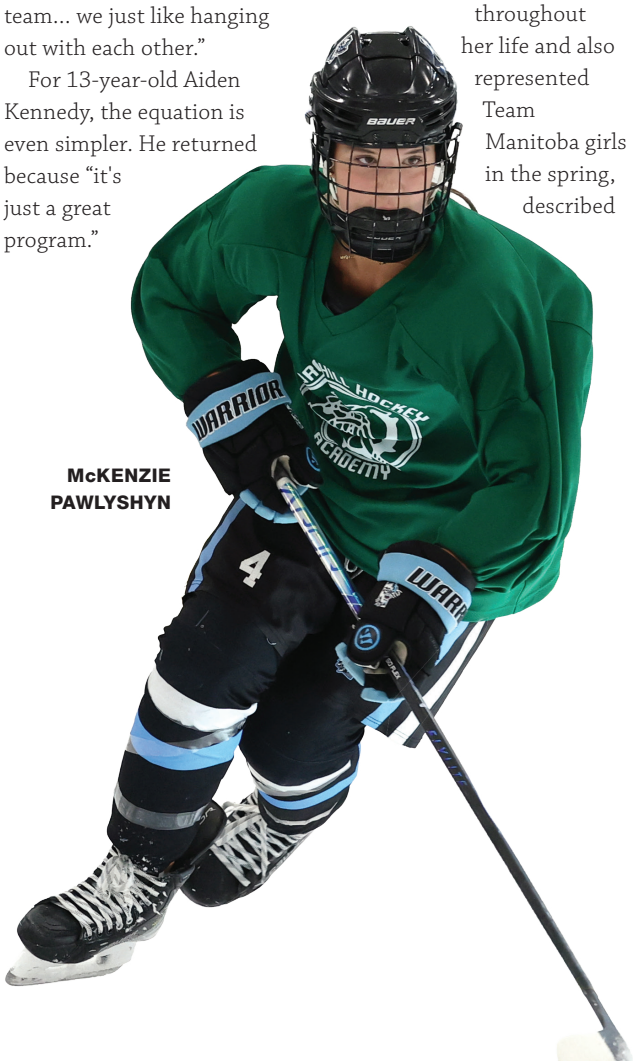
For 13-year-old Aiden Kennedy, the equation is even simpler. He returned because "it's just a great program."

Kennedy, who was trying out for the U15 AAA Thrashers, believes the additional ice time has accelerated his development.

"I feel like it's just that I've been getting better as I've been coming here," he said. "Every day, it's that being on the ice is getting better." And his plan? Keep coming back.

McKenzie Pawlyshyn understands that feeling. Her brother attended Collège Churchill before her, helping introduce her to the program. She initially came for the additional ice time. She returned because she loved it.

In fact, the 13-year-old, who has played boys hockey throughout her life and also represented Team Manitoba girls in the spring, described Collège Churchill as the best school to attend in Winnipeg. She already plans to return again next year.



McKENZIE PAWLYSHYN

Maya Grosney also came looking for development. Having started hockey at eight - later than many of the players around her - Grosney understood she had ground to make up. Her first experience on skates involved borrowed equipment and, by her recollection, spending considerably more time on her backside than her blades. She has come a long way.

Grosney said CHA's coaches have helped make her a much better player in a relatively short time, while also supporting her away from hockey.

And that matters to Varnes. CHA isn't simply trying to produce hockey players. The school component matters. Smaller classes in Grades 7 and 8, academic assistance and communication between teachers, students and parents help players keep up when tournaments with their own teams take them away from class.

Varnes talks about teaching life lessons and helping young people grow up to become good people. Klym sees the same thing. The coaches love following former players' hockey careers, but what really resonates is when those players return to visit.

"Nothing makes us feel happier than when the kids come back," Klym said.

And then there is Brady Piec. Perhaps nobody explains the Churchill effect better. Because Piec actually left. Then he came back.

Now 15 and playing U18 AAA with the Eastman Selects, Piec had already spent two years at Collège Churchill before going elsewhere. Eventually, he realized something. He wanted those years back.

"The development here is huge," Piec said, "and I felt like I had probably the two best years of my life when I was here. So, I just want to kind of replicate that again for another one."

Read that again. The two best years of his life. Not the two best development years. Not the two best hockey seasons. The two best years of his life.

For a hockey academy, there probably isn't a better testimonial, because players can always find ice elsewhere. They can find shooting instruction elsewhere. Skills coaches, weight rooms, skating instructors and development programs aren't exactly difficult to locate in a hockey-mad city like Winnipeg.

What isn't quite so easy to manufacture is belonging.

CHA has somehow created a place where a kid chasing the WHL or even the NHL can skate beside a kid simply trying to make his community team; where opponents at night can be friends in the morning; where siblings follow siblings through the program; and where former students still walk back through the doors because they miss the people who helped them get better.

Varnes has watched the academy grow from 28 players to 150 and yes, the numbers are impressive. But perhaps the most important number is this one: Another year.

Because when September rolls around, so many Churchill Hockey Academy players make exactly the same decision: they come back.



TEAM CANADA'S LEADERSHIP GROUP WITH THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY. HEAD COACH JOCELYNE LAROCQUE (FAR LEFT) LEADING SCORER CHANTAL LAROCQUE (LEFT WITH TROPHY) AND ASSISTANT COACH ANDY LAROCQUE (FAR RIGHT)



LEGENDS!

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Photos courtesy the Larocque Family

There was only one problem with putting one of Canada's greatest hockey players on the floor at the first-ever Women's Legends World Ball Hockey Championship.

Jocelyne Larocque was too young.

So, Canada did the next best thing. Our national ball hockey organization put her behind the bench. And with her older sister Chantal Fritzsche tearing up the tournament, their father Andy Larocque working alongside Jocelyne as an assistant coach, and Canada steamrolling its way to a historic gold medal in Czechia, the inaugural 40-plus Women's Legends championship became something much bigger than another Canadian hockey victory - it became a Larocque family affair.

For one remarkable Red River Métis family from Manitoba, two different generations and roles came together beneath the Maple Leaf - Jocelyne as head coach, Chantal as Canada's leading scorer and Andy as assistant coach.

And they couldn't have scripted the ending much better. Canada went a perfect 5-0 at the tournament in Černošice, Czechia, outscoring Great Britain, Czechia and the United States by an astonishing 44-0. The Canadians completed their romp with a 9-0 victory over Czechia in the gold-medal game.

Not a single goal against. Not a single loss. Not much suspense. But plenty of history.

CHANTAL IS THE STAR

For Chantal Fritzsche, co-founder of Manitoba Prairie Ball Hockey and the new executive director of the Manitoba Aboriginal Sports & Recreation Council, the tournament was spectacular.

Wearing No. 10, Fritzsche scored four goals and added 10 assists in five games. Her 14 points not only led Team Canada but also made her the tournament's overall scoring leader and earned her recognition as the All-Star Team's Top Forward. Not bad for a 40-plus tournament. And certainly not bad when your little sister is the boss.



CHANTAL (MIDDLE) WITH JOCELYNE AND ANDY (FAR RIGHT) AND THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY

Jocelyne, 38, Canada's most decorated international Indigenous athlete, couldn't play because the Women's Legends category was 40-and-over. So, she coached. "It was 40 and over," Jocelyne said. "So, it worked out really well. And dad was the assistant coach, so it was a big family affair."

And while Canada was clearly superior to the opposition — Jocelyne acknowledged that everyone would have preferred closer games — there was still something significant about getting the first Women's Legends World Championship off the ground.



THE LAROCQUE FAMILY WINS ANOTHER WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

CANADA DOMINATES THE WORLD

When something is being done for the first time, somebody has to establish the foundation and Canada certainly did that. The Canadians opened with an 11-0 win over Great Britain, blanked Czechia 8-0 and defeated the United States 6-0. They beat Great Britain again, 10-0 in the semifinal, before shutting out Czechia 9-0 for gold.

Five games. Five victories. Forty-four goals scored. Zero allowed.

For Andy Larocque, however, the scoreboard wasn't the most important part of the trip.

"I loved it for the outcome," Andy said. "And not because of us winning, but because of the unity we've seen with the other countries -- Czechia, Great Britain and even the U.S.

"After the ball hockey was over, everybody was talking about how do we keep building the women's ball hockey game? It was very interesting to be in that setting and hear the excitement that every country had about leagues growing and younger players getting involved. "So that's really the big win for Canada."

LASTING LEGACY

That might be the lasting legacy of the inaugural tournament. Canada was miles ahead this time. The challenge now is helping create a women's game in which more countries can close that gap.

And the Larocques are uniquely qualified to help. Andy coached his daughters growing up, long before Jocelyne became an international hockey star and long before the three found themselves representing Canada together on the other side of the Atlantic.

That history made for an interesting coaching dynamic in Czechia. "Dad, he does a good job of keeping things light and fun," Jocelyne said. "He gets the girls laughing and going. And it's funny because he coached Chantal and I growing up. So he knows the game."



CHANTAL LAROCQUE (MIDDLE) AND TEAM CANADA

Sometimes, however, the former coach still seemed to forget that his daughter now had the big whistle. "There were times where he'd tell me something and I'd say, 'Well, tell the girls that,'" Jocelyne laughed.

Andy would occasionally look for approval from the head coach before delivering a message.

Jocelyne's response?

"You see the game well. You don't need my approval."

THE LAROCQUE FAMILY

Apparently not much changes in a hockey family. Sometimes Dad is still Dad, even when his daughter is running Team Canada's bench. "We make a good team," Jocelyne said.

Their mornings in Czechia became part family breakfast and part coaches' meeting. They would head downstairs together, eat, discuss the lineup and work through different game situations. For Jocelyne, it was another glimpse into a possible future.

"Coaching is a natural transition from playing," she said. "It's something that I would definitely be interested in when I'm done playing... Anytime I get an opportunity to coach, you learn things and you learn things about the game that you can take as a player. Anytime I get to be involved in the sport, it's fun. And especially if I can do that with my family."

This wasn't even the Larocques' first adventure together on the international ball hockey stage. Jocelyne had previously coached with her father before later becoming eligible to play Masters ball hockey herself.

She described her progression simply: coach, player, coach. The family has experienced the other side of international competition, too, including an overtime loss to the United States in 2022, but they all came back in Buffalo, N.Y. in 2023, and won their first world championship together.

THRILL FOR DAD

It's unlikely anyone enjoyed this year's experience more than Andy.

He had one daughter beside him on Canada's bench and another dominating on the floor.

Chantal's performance was particularly fitting because her contribution to ball hockey goes far beyond scoring goals. As co-founder of Manitoba Prairie Ball Hockey, she has helped grow the sport at home while demonstrating internationally that competitive opportunities don't have to disappear when female athletes reach a certain age.

That was part of the message of the entire Legends championship. Women can keep playing. They can keep competing. They can keep representing their country. And, as Chantal proved rather emphatically, they can still light up a scoresheet.

The significance was magnified by the family's Red River Métis heritage. Three members of one Métis family representing Canada at a historic first world championship — daughter as head coach, daughter as star player, father as assistant coach — created an image far more meaningful than the final scores. This was family, heritage and sport intersecting on an international stage.

EXTRAORDINARY

It was also another extraordinary chapter in Jocelyne Larocque's remarkable hockey life. Yet this time she didn't have to score a goal, block a shot or defend a lead. She simply had to coach.

And judging by Canada's 5-0 record and 44-0 goal differential, she handled that assignment just fine.

Of course, the next Women's Legends championship should be more difficult. Andy believes improved goaltending alone among the developing countries could dramatically change the competitive landscape, and everyone involved understands that the international women's game needs continued growth.

That's exactly why Czechia mattered. The first tournament didn't have to be perfect. It just had to happen.



A DECADE IN THE MAKING

BY CARTER BROOKS

Photos courtesy of Dylan Asmundson and RINK





Long before RINK Hockey Academy sent players off to major junior, college and professional hockey, before 57 South Landing became its home and before hundreds of families wore the familiar R on their chest, there was an idea. Nearly two decades ago, a small group that included Brad and the late Tyler Rice, Tina Jones, former NHLer Mike Keane, Ryan Cyr and Jon Cara began laying the groundwork for what would become The RINK.

The concept was relatively simple. Give young hockey players access to professional instruction and specialized development in smaller groups, beginning with a three-on-three ice surface and eventually expanding into individualized goalie and player training.

"We kind of felt that we could create our own little niche with small groups and professional instruction," Cara told *Game On*. "This was years before every NHL team and everybody under the sun was calling themselves a development coach."

But as The RINK grew, those involved began noticing another trend. Talented Manitoba players were leaving home at 14 and 15 years old to attend hockey academies elsewhere in Western Canada. The question became: Why couldn't they just stick around and do that here?

"We wanted to keep more of those players in the province and have them have the opportunity to play and not have to leave home," Cara shared. "We could separate ourselves by providing this step-by-step development model."

That idea eventually became RINK Hockey Academy. Getting it off the ground, however, required considerably more than putting a team on the ice.

Brad Purdie remembers spending the year before RHA's first game working through approvals with Hockey Manitoba, Hockey Canada and the Canadian Sport School Hockey League, while trying to convince families to take a chance on something completely new.

"There was a lot of convincing to do with players you're trying to recruit – a lot of it was the fear of the unknown," Purdie said of the brand new program.

Rob Smith remembers that uncertainty particularly well. After coaching with the great Paul Dyck and the Steinbach Pistons, Smith joined RHA in April 2016. Almost immediately, Cyr handed him a rather daunting assignment: build a team from the ground up. Six weeks. Roughly 19 players. And no alumni, track record or previous season to point toward.

"You're selling a program that no one's ever been to," Smith laughed. His first recruit was Jesse Mistelbacher, of La Broquerie. Smith met Mistelbacher and his family at Coffee Culture in Steinbach, landed his first commitment and slowly watched the pieces begin falling into place.

Among those early players was a rather awkward 14-year-old named Seth Jarvis. Years later, Jarvis has become one of the NHL's most recognizable personalities and, this past June, the first RHA alumnus to lift the Stanley Cup. For Purdie, seeing Jarvis raise hockey's greatest prize was "the cherry on top." But what happened when the Cup came home meant almost as much. Former teammates and families who hadn't seen one another in years reunited to celebrate with Jarvis and his family.

"Ten years of doing this, obviously the Stanley Cup's an outcome," Cara said. "But just the amount that those families have stayed close and stayed in touch and the connection they had from being a part of our program was super cool to see."

Those relationships are among the greatest measures of success for the coaches who helped build the program. Smith now sees former players entering business, university and careers. Some have even returned to The RINK itself. Ethan Alsip works within the organization, while Evan Kaufman, a player on RHA's first team, now coaches alongside Smith.

"Hockey ends for us all at some point," Smith said. "But you have a relationship or a friendship or somebody that you've gained from this program."









The surroundings have certainly changed, too. At the old 91 Lowson Crescent facility, RHA operated without a full-sized sheet of ice. Coaches packed equipment into vans and travelled to Southdale for practices. Players stored gear in portable units behind the building and trained in a considerably smaller gym.

"How we ever got anything done over there was kind of mind boggling," Purdie chuckled. Today, 57 South Landing offers virtually everything under one roof. Players can practice, train, store equipment, have laundry done and skates sharpened without leaving the facility. Strength and conditioning staff can communicate directly with coaches about injuries, workload and fatigue, allowing on-ice sessions to be adjusted accordingly.

"It's the one-stop shop," Cara said. "Having all of that in one area is so simplified and benefits the players so much."

The Winnipeg academy has grown from two teams to six, while another seven operate in Kelowna. The development model now stretches down to younger ages, creating pathways that weren't imaginable in those earliest days.

Cara points to Matthew Gard as perhaps the purest example. Gard first arrived at The RINK through learn-to-skate programming before progressing through the academy system and eventually reaching the professional ranks. Yet ask the coaches what they're proudest of and the conversation inevitably drifts away from draft positions and hockey resumes.

Smith remembers parents approaching him after seasons and marveling at how much their children had matured. Players learned about nutrition, time management and communication. They volunteered in the community, became more independent and formed friendships that have endured long after leaving the academy. Purdie sees the same thing.

"We've made some pretty good people," he said. "We taught them how to be good people, good friends, good teammates, all that stuff. And they're going to carry that with them wherever they go, whatever profession they choose."

Seventeen years after a small group began imagining what hockey development could look like in Manitoba, Cara admits he never envisioned where that idea would lead. Now, as RINK Hockey Academy celebrates 10 seasons of developing young athletes, its Winnipeg facility is nearing capacity and the organization is considering where its development model could travel next. Predicting another decade seems almost impossible. After all, nobody predicted this one.

"It just started with a dream," Cara said. "I would have never expected us to be at this level."

What began as an opportunity to give Manitoba players somewhere to develop close to home has become something considerably larger. And perhaps the greatest evidence of how far RHA has come isn't hanging from the rafters or written on a player's Elite Prospects stats page. It's in the former players who keep walking back in through the doors.



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THE MAVERICKS ARE BUILDING HOCKEY PLAYERS - AND HOCKEY SCHOLARS

BY SCOTT TAYLOR
Photos by Darryl Gershman

JUST HAVING FUN PLAYING HOCKEY. THE U16 MAVERICKS, FROM LEFT, CADY MCAULEY, CIARA MARTIN AND CAPTAIN RIELLE FORFAR

The Manitoba Mavericks' coaching staff isn't interested in teaching young hockey players where to stand. They'd rather teach them why they're standing there. There's a difference.

And for former NHLer and Pittsburgh Penguins' Stanley Cup champion Jamie Leach, that difference might ultimately determine just how far a young player can go.

"I want them to read it," said Leach, head coach of the Manitoba Mavericks U16 girls. "I want them to become hockey scholars. Let's build a hockey IQ."

Welcome to Year 2 of the Manitoba Mavericks. The female hockey program that set out to provide Manitoba players with a prep-style development experience without forcing families to pay traditional prep-school prices is beginning to find its stride. And judging by what happened at the Mavericks' U16 AA Showcase at Seven Oaks Arena in late September, the education is progressing rather nicely.

The Mavericks defeated the Edmonton Angels 4-0 and 3-2 and hammered the Saskatoon Phantoms 6-0 and 8-0. Four games. Four wins. Twenty-one goals for. Two against. And Leach still saw plenty that needed fixing. That might tell you everything you need to know about what the Mavericks are trying to build.

"We are a pretty dominant team right now," Leach said. "We control everything all over the ice."

Yet after watching his team put 50 shots on goal in one of its games, Leach wasn't interested in admiring the scoreboard. He was thinking about puck movement, shooting, decision-making and all the little details that separate talented young players from accomplished ones.



ANOTHER WIN. GOALIE JORDAN BREWER AND DEFENDER RIELLE FORFAR



HOCKEY IS FUN, MAVERICKS U16 PLAYERS TIA GRIMSTRUP AND CADY MCAULEY

"The development from Day 1, from June until now, the skill development these girls have seen is off the charts," Leach said. "They're passing the puck, they're accepting passes, shooting hard while in flight. It's been great to watch."

For the Mavericks, that's the point. Winning is nice, but development is the mission. General manager Jeff Rotinsky believes the most important investment the organization can make is in the people doing the teaching. And he has assembled quite a faculty.

The U16 coaching staff includes Leach and fellow former NHLer Dale Weise, along with Alannah Raposo, an accomplished player and coach who has worked throughout Manitoba female hockey. The U14 squad is also coached by experienced, talented hockey people – former WHL star Liam Schioler and former University of Manitoba defender Camille Enns.

"I've been watching the program for a couple of years, and I really liked the direction Jeff was taking it and I decided to get involved," said Weise, who played with the Rangers, Canucks, Canadiens, Blackhawks, and Flyers during a 10-year NHL career. "Whether I get out there in the morning or whether I'm doing video with the girls, I have a fluid position. But I'm super excited about it and looking forward to taking on a bigger role next year."

Along with Weise, there is also specialized instruction, including consultant Craig Malaschuk and goalie coach Kyle Kettles. Rotinsky believes it gives the Mavericks something significant to offer families trying to determine the best development path for their daughters.

"What I'm selling is this coaching staff," Rotinsky said. "You've got Dale and Jamie and Alannah. You've got people who know the game. This might be the best coaching staff that any U16 girls team has - in the country."

However, it isn't simply about putting impressive names behind the bench, either. It's about teaching. Leach, in his first experience coaching girls, has quickly embraced it. Rather than overload his players with complicated systems, he wants them to understand the game well enough to make decisions themselves.

His players ask questions. Lots of them. And Leach loves it. When they want to know whether the Mavericks are going to run an umbrella on the power play, for instance, his answer is essentially: "eventually." "First, let's understand the game," he said with a laugh. "Then we can understand a system."

That approach is central to what Rotinsky envisioned when he created the Mavericks - high-level instruction and a significant volume of development time while allowing players to remain in their own schools and communities.

NICOLE HUTCHINSON



HOCKEY IS FUN, KAITLYN DIXON-HAYES

THE MAVS SEMIAH BRUNEL-TORRIE



FROM LEFT U16 COACH ALANNAH RAPOSO GM JEFF ROTINSKY AND HEAD COACH JAMIE LEACH

The U16 Mavericks play a 32-game regular-season schedule, along with tournaments, exhibition opportunities and playoffs. Their schedule includes showcase travel to centres such as Saskatoon, Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary.

The development commitment is equally significant. Rotinsky said the program had more than 77 practices last season, each lasting 90 minutes - more than 110 hours of practice development alone. The Mavericks want the experience to feel big-time. They just don't want the bill to look quite as big-time.

"Prep hockey without the prep price tag," Rotinsky said. "That's exactly what we want to do. We want to have girls feel like they're professionals at that next level at a very affordable cost."

The current U16 cost is approximately $12,000 per player, according to Rotinsky, including team travel and hotels. The organization also supplies items such as skate sharpening and hockey tape throughout the season.

More importantly, players can continue attending their existing schools. For Rotinsky, it's about creating another pathway to college and university - not necessarily replacing ones that already exist.

The Mavericks are in their second season in the Female Super League and are still navigating some of the complications that come with building an independent program. FSL teams are not currently sanctioned by Hockey Manitoba under regulations aligned with Hockey Canada, meaning their players are not eligible for Hockey Manitoba's Program of Excellence.

The Mavericks, however, continue to build. And win. Both their U14 and U16 teams have risen to the top of their respective power rankings early in the season.

"We're definitely making a progression," Rotinsky said. "You'll see by the amount of people in the stands. There have been a lot of people coming back and really having positive things to say. Winning is contagious."



CIARA MARTIN

CADY MCAULEY

True, but perhaps the Mavericks' greatest selling point is sitting behind their bench. Raposo understands the opportunity because she remembers when it didn't exist. She played AA and junior hockey herself before moving into coaching, where her resume has included a Division II championship with the Garden City Gophers, a city championship with the U13 AA Titans, the U18 AA Ice and AAA spring hockey.

When Raposo looks at what today's young female players have available, she can't help but think about what she would have wanted at the same age.

"I would have killed to play in a league like this," she said. "This was not an option when I was this age and playing hockey. So, my big motivator as a coach is being able to provide these girls opportunities that weren't available to me when I was playing."

That might be the Mavericks story in a nutshell: Opportunity.

Goalie Jordan Brewer, for example, has already been invited to and participated in the Bemidji State University women's high school camp.

For a program whose stated objective is to create a pathway toward college or university hockey, those are the opportunities that matter. The wins will get attention. An 8-0 victory will turn heads. And the beautiful uniforms in Mavericks colours are becoming increasingly recognizable.

But ultimately, Rotinsky and his coaches are trying to build something that lasts beyond one weekend, one season or one championship. They want young female players to receive high-level coaching, substantial development time, exposure to programs beyond Manitoba and an opportunity to discover where hockey might take them.

Raposo wants to provide the opportunities she never had. Rotinsky wants to make those opportunities financially attainable for more families. And Leach? He wants hockey players who can think. Players who don't simply wait for a coach to tell them where to go next. Players who can read the ice, understand the game and make the right decision themselves. Hockey scholars.

NOTES FROM PILOT MOUND

BY SCOTT TAYLOR AND GORDIE TUMILSON

Photos courtesy of Pilot Mound Hockey Academy, Becky Fleury/Art4Athletes and Carson McConnell.

Big Expectations From Pilot Mound's own Ramage Family This Season

1. Local heroes **Maddox** and **Nash Ramage** are expected to have a major impact on Pilot Mound Hockey Academy's fortunes this season. Nash will play with the U15 Prep club while older brother Maddox will play for the U18 squad as a 16-year-old. He'll also attend the WHL's Swift Current Broncos training camp and the MJHL's Niverville Nighthawks camp (he had three goals in Niverville's first pre-season game). Last season, Maddox, 16 and already 6-foot-2, 175 pounds, had 24 goals and 47 points in 29 U17 male Prep games in the CSSHL. Meanwhile, 14-year-old Nash, had 14 goals and 29 points in 30 CSSHL games with the U15 male Prep team – the third leading scorer on the team at age 13. Nash and Maddox's dad, who is deeply involved with both hockey and baseball in the region, is the principal at Pilot Mound Collegiate, a school of about 150 students, 100 of whom are affiliated with Pilot Mound Hockey Academy.



1 MADDOX RAMAGE AND NASH RAMAGE

2. Buffaloes' vets **Nash Ramage, Zack Klassen** and **Ryder Spurrill** have been selected for the Hockey Manitoba U15 Boys POE Competition Phase, held in Winnipeg. Our two newest signings, **Connor Braun** and **Konnor Dixon,** will also attend.



2 BUFFALOES VETS RYDER SPURRILL, NASH RAMAGE AND ZACK KLASSEN

3. It's a record-breaking year for PMHA. This fall, 11 current or former members of the Buffaloes attended Western Hockey League training camps: **Anson Salamandyk,** Victoria Royals; **Brett Buors,** Prince George Cougars; **Max Faulkner,** Prince George Cougars; **Knox Burton,** Seattle Thunderbirds; **Carson Flock,** Calgary Hitmen; **Easton Samuelson,** Red Deer Rebels; **Gavin Hildebrand,** Penticton Vees; **Cole Landreville,** Edmonton Oil Kings; **Brock Vodden,** Swift Current Broncos; **Will Mateychuk,** Vancouver Giants and, of course, **Maddox Ramage** with the Swift Current Broncos. That's an incredible list of up-and-coming WHL stars.



3 BUFFALOES VETS AT WHL CAMPS FROM LEFT SALAMANDYK, VODDEN, BURTON AND FAULKNER



3 PMHA VETS AT WHL CAMPS, FROM LEFT HILDEBRAND, LANDREVILLE, RAMAGE AND BUORS

4. PMHA will host a U18 male Prep Showcase, Nov. 20-22 and a U16 male Prep Showcase, Jan. 15-17, 2027. As well, Pilot Mound will play host to the 1st Elgin Phair Memorial Tournament for U17 Prep and AAA from Dec. 11-13, as well as the 1st Dennis Sutherland Memorial Tournament for U18 female Prep from Jan. 22-24, 2027.



4 BUFFALOES U18 PREP STAR AIDEN MASSE

5. A trio of Buffaloes were signed to Superior International Junior Hockey League contracts by the Dryden Ice Dogs this summer. **Chadrick Schulz, Adam Zamecnik** and **Carsten Campbell** will all begin their Jr. A journeys this fall. Interestingly, **Dylan Sveinson,** the son of Ice Dogs owner **Mike Sveinson,** starred with the U17 Prep team last season and played alongside Schulz and Zamecnik.



5 SOON TO BE DRYDEN ICE DOGS, FROM LEFT CHADRICK SCHULZ, ADAM ZAMECNIK AND CARSTEN CAMPBELL

6. It was a big off-season for Pilot Mound Hockey Academy's **Hector Kapitonov,** who represented the Netherlands at the 2026 IIHF U18 World Championship (Division 2B). The diminutive 5-foot-8, 143-pound Kapitonov hails from Roermond, Limburg, Netherlands. He had 10 goals and 29 points in 30 games in the U18 Prep Division of the Canadian Sport Schools Hockey League last season. He had a monster tournament for Holland at the Worlds. Kapitonov had eight goals and 12 points in five games for the Netherlands at the IIHF World U18 D2B tournament.



6 PMHA'S HECTOR KAPITONOV SCORES FOR THE NETHERLANDS AT THE WORLDS

7. PMHA U18 male Prep Goaltender **Zackary David** has signed on to play for the Butte Irish of NA3HL in Butte, Montana. A product of Riverview, N.B., the 5-foot-10, 165-pound netminder had a 4.05 goals against average and an .891 save percentage in 14 games in the CSSHL last season.



7 ZACKARY DAVID

8. There was also a trio of college signings this summer. **Aiden Masse,** a 6-foot, 150-pound forward from Calgary who played U18 male Prep last season has committed to play ACHA hockey at Paul Smith's College in Paul Smith's, New York for the 2026-27 season. **Rehn Hall** from Medicine Hat, Alta., the goalie for the U18 female Prep Buffaloes last season, has signed on with the Northwestern Polytechnic Wolves of the Alberta Colleges Conference. For those who might not know, Northwestern Polytechnic was previously known as Grande Prairie Regional College. And **Jorja Atkinson** from Chilliwack, B.C., a member of the U18 female Prep Buffaloes last season, has committed to play ACHA hockey for the University of Jamestown in Jamestown, N.D.



8 JORJA ATKINSON



8 REHN HALL

9. Two members of last season's U18 male Prep Buffaloes will pursue Jr. A hockey this fall. **Collin Friedrich,** the 5-foot-7, 150-pound forward from Tampa, Fla., will attend training camp with the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Dauphin Kings this September, while **Kolton Bigras,** the Buffaloes 6-foot-4, 205-pound defender from Fort St. John, B.C., has signed a letter of intent to play for the Drayton Valley Thunder of the Alberta Junior Hockey League.



9 FUTURE JUNIOR STARS, BUFFALOES KOLTON BIGRAS AND COLLIN FRIEDRICH

10. In July, **Cole Landreville** of St. Claude, Man., who left Pilot Mound after the 2025-26 season and played with the Western Hockey League's Edmonton Oil Kings, was invited to Hockey Canada's U17 National Team camp. Landreville played three full seasons with the Buffaloes and was named to the CSSHL's U18 Top Freshman Team in 2025-26.



10 COLE LANDREVILLE

11. This past summer, **Brock Vodden,** the Buffaloes' U15 top prospect from Manitou, Man., was selected in the third round, 51st overall, by the Edmonton Oil Kings, in the 2026 Western Hockey League Bantam Draft. Vodden attended Oil Kings rookie camp this fall. Vodden was the fourth Manitoban taken in the draft after Easton Pitz from Virden (27th by Swift Current), Marko Malbasa from St. Andrews (42nd by Brandon) and Nixon Gaudet from Ile Des Chênes (46th by Kamloops).



11 BROCK VODDEN

12. PMHA will play host to its first league-wide CSSHL Showcase, officially named The Pilot Mound Hockey Academy Foundation Showcase. The event, which will be held Nov. 12-15, 2026, will be for U17 Male players and will be held at rinks in Pilot Mound, Manitou and Swan Lake. There will be 16 teams involved – estimated at 320 players, 65 coaches and staff, 300 family members, 15-20 league executives and 20-40 scouts converging on Southwestern Manitoba. Sponsored by Boston Pizza, it will be a first-of-its-kind Southwest Manitoba Community-wide event.



12 PILOT MOUND U17 PREP STAR DYLAN SVEINSON



CONGRATS REAVO!

There are a number of typical ways to measure a hockey career: goals, assists, championships and awards usually come to mind, but sometimes simply sticking around tells the story better than any statistic ever could.

Winnipeg's Ryan Reaves stuck around for 16 NHL seasons, building one of the longest and most memorable careers of any Manitoba-born player of his generation.

Long before he became "Reavo," one of hockey's most recognizable tough guys, Reaves was another Winnipeg kid winning provincial titles with the St. John's-Ravenscourt Eagles.

Soon after, he learned how to throw down with the WHL's Brandon Wheat Kings before the St. Louis Blues selected him in the fifth round of the 2005 NHL Draft.

Over 962 regular-season NHL games with seven organizations, he accumulated 1,137 penalty minutes, 3,225 hits and 94 fights, while adding another 113 playoff appearances. He was physical, intimidating and never particularly interested in making life comfortable for the opposition.

But lasting 16 seasons in that role required more than a willingness to drop the gloves. Reaves adapted as the game changed, brought an unmistakable personality to every dressing room and became a fan favourite in city after city. "It's hard to make this league," he wrote when announcing his retirement. "It's even harder to stay in it." Few understood that better.

From Winnipeg minor hockey to nearly 1,000 games at hockey's highest level, Reaves found a way to stay far longer than 10-year-old Reavo ever could have imagined. Now, one of Manitoba's own has dropped the gloves for good, leaving behind a career well worth celebrating. As Reaves put it one final time: "You can rest easy knowing the corners are a little safer today. Mic drop, gloves drop. Reavo out."

Photos by James Carey Lauder and Rusty Barton



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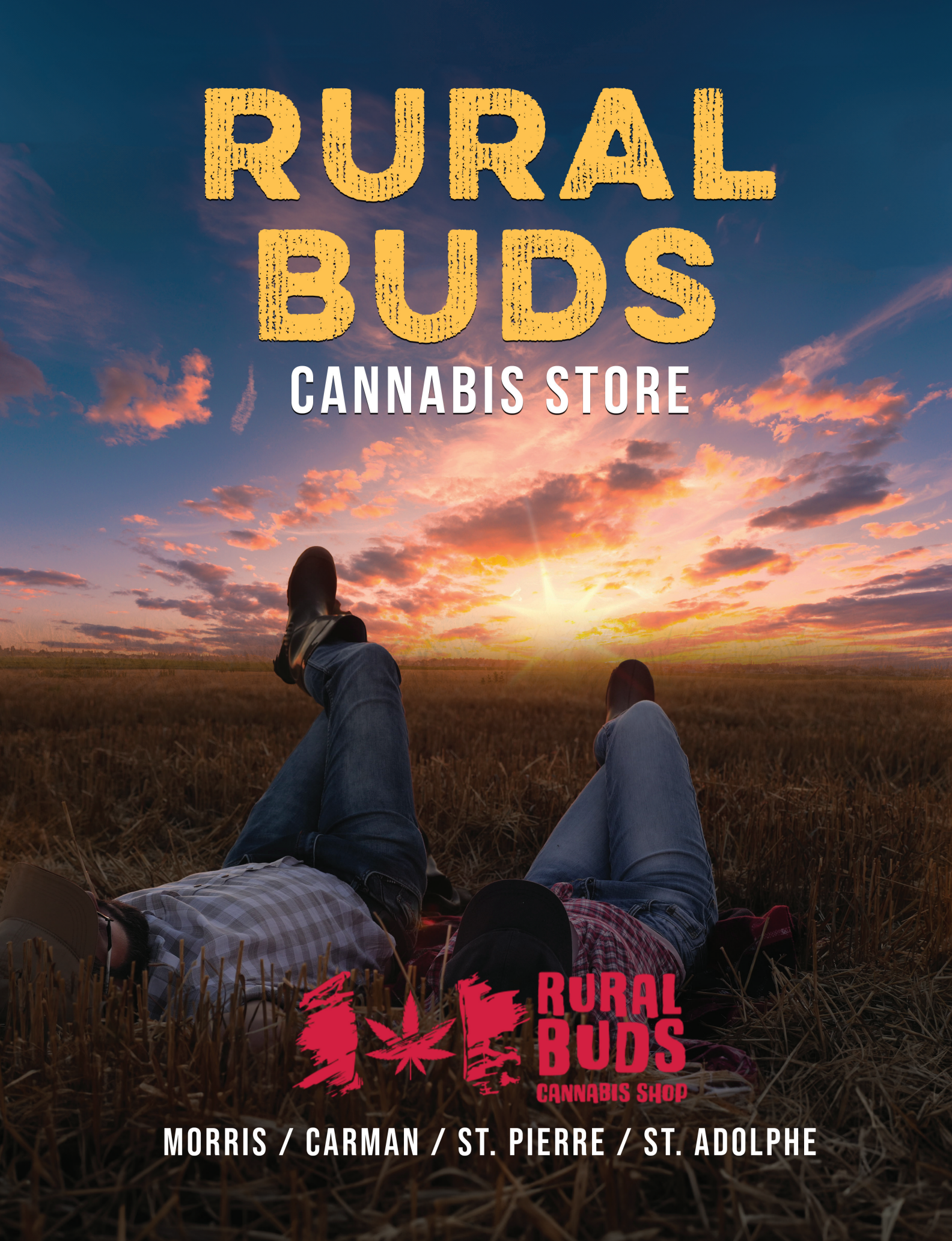
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