



## **Memories of Sport**

**By Kent Morgan**

**(courtesy of Canstar Community News)**

Ask older hockey players or fans what the term, Booster Night, means to them and the answer invariably will be playground hockey.

Booster Night was a special event when the top two playground teams in the city of Winnipeg competed for the championship. The game was played either in the Amphitheatre where Great West Life sits or the Olympic rink off Main St. in the North End.

For some players, it would mean their first game on inside ice.

That was the case for Len Morrow, who still has the program his mother saved from the 10th annual Booster Night played at the Amph on Jan. 25, 1949 when Norquay Park in Point Douglas squared off against Thames from Elmwood with the Norquay squad winning 3-2 in front of 4,000 fans.

The attacking unit of Len Rebec, Dolph Meder and Eddie Bohonus accounted for all three goals. The *Free Press* reported that only the sensational goalkeeping of Ray Hoskins in the Thames cage kept the score down. Harry Dietz and Ronnie Korchynski scored and Morrow and Bob Currie played well for the losers.

Playground hockey got its start in January 1928. Teams were located on school grounds and vacant lots within the City of Winnipeg boundaries and players remember the low boards on the rinks. Each team could have nine players, who had not reached their 13th birthday by Jan. 1. The suburbs were not involved.

Atlantic won the first championship beating Austin in the final.

A story in the 10th Booster Night program stated that scores of famous players now performing in the NHL and other pro leagues in North America and England got their start in Winnipeg's Playground League, the largest of its kind in the world. That season - 1948-49 - 24 teams competed, with all games played on Saturday mornings.

In looking back at Booster Night games, several names jumped out. In 1946, Perth from West Kildonan beat Clifton from the West End 6-5. League scoring leader Gordon (Gabby) Pankhurst erupted for four third-period goals. Billy Reichart, already nicknamed Rocket at age 10, and Dick Wright, a future Manitoba men's curling champion, were in



the winner's lineup. Future Manitoba Hockey Association referee-in-chief Gordie Kerr played for Clifton.

Perth retained its title the next winter beating Downing 7-3. Reichart and Allan Jacques combined on six goals with Jacques notching four. Captain Wright had a singleton. Downing didn't lack in fire power with future pros Bruce Carmichael and Al Johnson.

In 1948, Thames was scheduled to play Queenston in the final after knocking off Elgin 2-0 in one semi-final.

However, the authorities discovered that Thames had dressed four overage players so the game was replayed with Elgin winning 2-1. With more than 4,000 fans watching on Booster Night, the team from central Winnipeg beat the River Heights squad 3-1.

Described as a little red-headed left-handed stickhandler, who played right wing, Joe Cyr was the dominant force. He scored twice and set up the third goal by Tom Schoen. The Queenston lineup that season included future pro Bob Chorley, NHLer Mike Keane's father Jack (aka Weiner), and Gary Cribbs, who went on to serve as MJHL commissioner and president of the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame.

(This was the first part of a series on minor hockey in Winnipeg. Part 2, focusing on the early years of the Greater Winnipeg Minor Hockey Association, will run Feb. 28.