



Memories of Sport

By Kent Morgan

(courtesy of Canstar Community News)

A long-retired referee recently suggested a column about the Greater Winnipeg Minor Hockey Association (GWMHA). He said this columnist as bantam B referee-in-chief assigned him to his first game back in the 1960s.

The GWMHA was formed in August 1956 under the direction of City of Winnipeg recreation director Charles Barbour. The goal was to keep more players involved in hockey as they grew older.

In the 1955-56 season, more than 1,000 players 14 and under played bantam hockey. At the time, there were only seven midget and six juvenile teams in the city, so only one in eight players received the opportunity to jump to a higher category. The bantam teams played in their own districts while the older boys played for teams with a connection to junior teams.

Under the GWMHA, the same zones were adopted for midget and juvenile and no pro-sponsored teams would be allowed. City playground hockey remained under the jurisdiction of the Parks Board until 1959, when the GWMHA took over and unified the city and suburban leagues. Playground had three divisions, A for age 12, B for 11 and C for 10.

The new system led to major rivalries between community clubs in the same region: Bronx Park/Kelvin, CUAC/CPAC, Earl Grey/River Heights, Lord Roberts/Riverview, Norwood/Norwood Falcons, West End Memorials/West End Orioles, Silver Heights/Deer Lodge, Norberry/Glenwood, Fort Garry/Victoria, Isaac Brock/Weston.

Until the City opened the Old Exhibition and Grant Park-Nathaniel rinks in the early 1960s, most games were scheduled outside at community clubs.

The first GWMHA midget (15-16) and juvenile (17-18) all-star games were played at the Olympic rink on March 29, 1959. Bronx Park juvenile all-star Bruce Unfried, who played for the North Division, still had a program. His North teammates included future Winnipeg Ranger juniors Keith Micklash from Bronx and Tom Trosky from Transcona East End, Jim Kenning from Bronx, (who played at the University of Denver), and the Harrison brothers, Jim and Gerry from Transcona. Biff Homiak from Bronx soon turned to officiating. Unfried went on to play for the intermediate Huskies in The Pas where he was mayor.



The South team coached by the legendary Armo Armstrong had Mark Girardin, Billy Smythe, Don White and Mark Young from his two-time city champion Sir John Franklin squad. The roster included John Russell of Norwood, Dennis Toyne from Falcons and Earl Grey's Tom Gill and Don Baizley, later a prominent hockey agent. All moved up to junior.

The first names to jump out of the North midget lineup were 'Joe Deley' from Bronx Park, actually Joe Daley, who went on to be the Winnipeg Jets goalie, and future NHLer Jimmy Johnson of Memorials. Roy Davidson from Bronx and Bob Stoyko and Brian Strimbiski of CUAC played at UND after their junior careers. Strimbiski also won two Allan Cups with the Spokane Jets. Wilson Parasuik from Transcona Pirates played at Oxford University and served as a cabinet minister in Premier Howard Pawley's NDP government.

The South goalies were Riverview's Brian Lunney, who played several seasons in the USHL, and Ken Esdale of Silver Heights, who occasionally donned the pads for Canada's National Team when it was based in Winnipeg. John Trojack from Earl Grey anchored the U of M defence when the Bisons won their only national title in 1964. Steve Yoshino from Isaac Brock went on to a starry career at Michigan Tech. Tough Terry Moore from Riverview later led the MJHL in penalty minutes for two seasons. Ray Clearwater, Mike MacKenzie and Bill Percy were future juniors from River Heights.

St.-Johns Ravenscourt produced one player, Dave (Hawk) Wolch, a golfer of note.

Believe it or not, in the early days of the GWMHA, the referee assignments were published weekly in the daily newspapers. You wouldn't do that today.