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# Tournament a boost to local coffers

## Hocktoberfest grows to 122 teams

BY TREVOR WILHELM, THE WINDSOR STAR OCTOBER 26, 2009



Lauren Wilson, centre, of Sarnia Lady Sting, carries the puck against Julia Chiavarini, left, and Logan Blake of St. Catharine's Chaos in pee wee A action at the Hocktoberfest International Female Minor Hockey Festival at South Windsor Arena Sunday. St. Catharines won 4-0.

Photograph by: Nick Brancaccio, The Windsor Star, The Windsor Star

If you think you're man enough for this game, think again.

Some of these girls might prefer their goalie pads and hockey tape to be pretty in pink, but they aren't worried about breaking a nail. They play hard, skate hard and like to hit hard, even though they're not supposed to.

Hundreds of girls came from across the continent and even an ocean on the weekend for Windsor's second annual Hocktoberfest Female Hockey Festival, where body checking isn't allowed, to the disappointment of many players.

"I want to check people, I thought the hitting part was pretty cool," said Sarnia Sting player Sydney Smith, 14, who wanted to play in a boys league when she was younger so she could hit. "But girls are faster, better. Pretty physical."

The tournament attracted 122 teams -- 34 more than last year -- which played at arenas across the region. Teams came from all over Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Missouri. There were even two teams from England.

There were so many players, coaches and parents that organizers said most hotel rooms in town were booked.

In addition to each team's \$949 registration fee, which pays for ice time and other costs for the non-profit event, the players and their entourages injected millions of dollars into the local economy.

"It's fantastic news for the city," said Gordon Orr, managing director of the convention and visitors

bureau. "Sport tourism is a very important component to how we move forward in promoting this destination. Our tourism infrastructure is certainly growing with the WFCU Centre, the Vollmer complex and now Essex Arena. Any time you can inject 122 teams coming into the community, leaving behind significant tourism dollars, it's a welcome addition to our roster of events, conferences and sporting events."

Aside from being an economic stimulator, the popularity of the tournament might also be a sign of changing times for girls hockey, even if the change is slow.

Betty Gangnon, site manager at South Windsor arena, said this is still one of the few large tournaments for girls but it's growing in leaps and bounds. She said things have changed a lot since she was a kid, when there was little opportunity for girls to lace up. Gangnon didn't start playing hockey until age 58, just because there was no place for her to do it.

"This is unbelievable for girls," she said. "Female hockey has been so slow in growing. We grew up, it was a boys game. Now the girls are getting the ice time more."

Shauna McPhail, who played in a boys league for a few years, picked up a stick after seeing her brothers play. She also wasn't a big fan of the other options usually open to girls.

"I hate figure skating," said McPhail, 14, from Sarnia. "I'm not a girly-girl. I have four brothers that play hockey and I just like the game."

McPhail said she was an "alright" hockey player, then added she couldn't think of many boys -- including her brothers -- that could beat her.

The players weren't the only people engaging in a little trash talk.

"Some of these girls could take down the boys real fast," said Gangnon, also a coach. "It's supposed to be no contact. They do some bumping and we do have some games where there are lots of penalties. It can get rough."

Hockey mom Arlene Hamilton laughed out loud at the suggestion that boys could skate circles around any of these girls.

"Good luck with that," said Hamilton, whose daughter plays for the London Devilettes.

"The girls, especially the 10, 11, 12-year-olds, are definitely stronger than the boys. They've got better finesse. The boys are kind of clumsy at that age. We usually have one or two games a year where we take them on. They get smoked."

She said the fact that body checks aren't allowed doesn't mean there are no bruises to nurse when the final buzzer goes.

"We don't have checking but there's definitely body contact, and the girls seem to know where to hit and hurt," said Hamilton.

"It's beautiful to watch when it's working well. It's hard to see the girls go down. But as they get older they know and they're ready for it, they're tough. It's a beautiful game."

But Hamilton said hockey has done more for her daughter Julia, 14, than simply make her tough. "It's done everything for her," said Hamilton. "She gets that team approach. She was so shy as a child. She's got more confidence in herself. It's been great."

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See our photo gallery of action from Hocktoberfest.

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