

BATTLING AT THE PUCK

Growing up in California, the only ice I ever saw was in my glass of soda. The kids in my neighborhood had heard of hockey, but the chance of anyone actually getting to play a real game of hockey seemed about as remote as getting to ski-jump or bobsled.

So when I was given the opportunity to see some ice "up close" by the club hockey team during one of its practices, I jumped on the chance. While other guys from the neighborhood could say they were the first to graduate from college or make a million dollars, I could claim to be the first to ever play "real" hockey.

As my skating skill rivals that of any average eight-year-old, it was clear the only position I could play was goaltender. By playing goalie, I wouldn't have to repeatedly skate up and down the rink, and if I were to fall and need help up, I could use the goalposts for support. John O'Donnell, the "usual" goalie, was gracious enough to loan me his goaltender's equipment. He was also nice enough to dress me. There were so many straps, buckles and strings on the equipment, it looked like the lingerie section of a department store.

The primary protective equipment was a cast iron athletic cup. O'Donnell told me, unnecessarily, that this was essential. Next came the padded shorts, vest and shoulder protection. And then was the trademark piece of goaltender's equipment, a pair of leg pads.

While dressing, other players told me that,

even though they had played hockey for several years, they had never played goaltender. Ross Sanders, another Oregon goaltender, said he first tried the goalie position while an adolescent only because his doctor would not let him play a skating position while he was recovering from an injury.

O'Donnell said one reason very few people ever try the goalie's position is because of the prohibitive cost of the equipment.

"It probably costs about \$1,500 just to outfit a goaltender," O'Donnell said. "The leg pads you have on are probably worth \$400, even though they're pretty old."

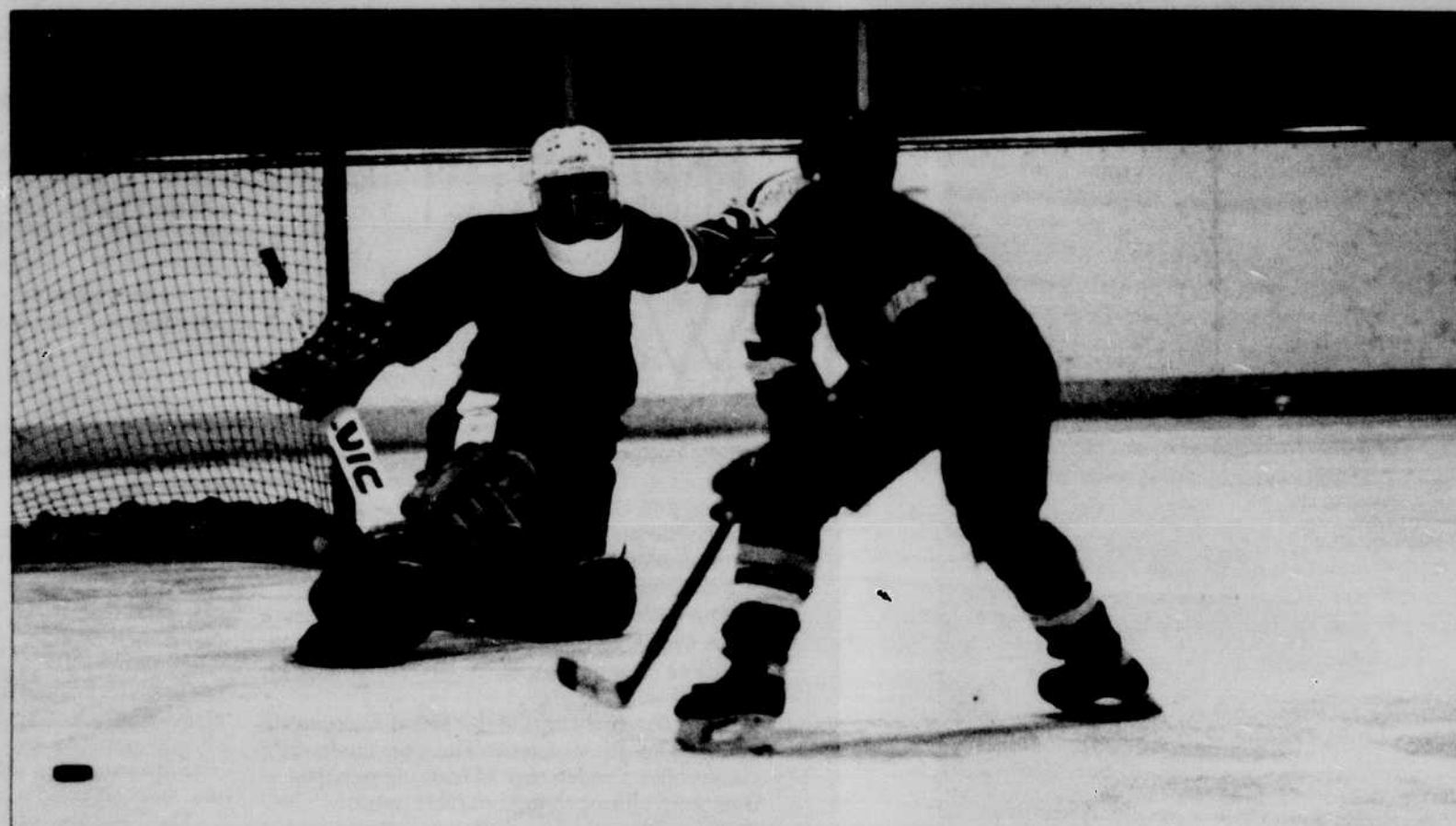
O'Donnell's comment was an understatement, they looked to be the style used before goaltender masks were invented.

O'Donnell explained the basics of goaltending to me and then slapped a few shots toward me in the locker room for practice. He told me to leave my mask off so that I could see better. I thought to myself that he was so experienced there was no chance he could mistakenly shoot high and ruin my orthodontist's work, but after his second shot went flying by neck high, I told him it was time for me to get used to the mask.

I tentatively stepped onto the ice and surprisingly found that it wasn't too difficult to maneuver about. Instead of slipping around as I anticipated, I weighed so much with all the padding on, my blades just sank into the ice.

Sanders gave me my first bit of advice and reminded me that although the Duck players are good, they do not have NHL caliber shots.

"Even if you just stand in front of the net and don't move, they'll miss the goal about half



Emerald sports reporter Erick Studenicka tries his luck as goalie during a club sports hockey team practice.

Photo by Kim Nguyen

the time," Sanders said.

The first drill I participated in was a two-on-one drill, where two players advance toward the goalie unopposed. There was little to do but hope the puck might hit me as the shots came rifling in. After allowing 49 of 50 shots to go into the net, I felt bad for not offering enough resistance. But Sanders also had trouble stopping the unopposed skaters, easing my worries somewhat.

When I first skated onto the ice, I felt as if I

was in the dairy section of Safeway. But now, after skating and flopping around on the ice with 50 pounds of pads on for 15 minutes, my body temperature increased dramatically. Because of the insulating qualities of the pads, playing a hockey goaltender is probably the "hottest" job in all of sport, despite the cooling effects of the ice.

On the few times I was able to place my body between the puck and the goal, I flinched as I expected the puck to sting upon impact.

Instead, because the padding was so heavy, I actually didn't feel a thing. This became a problem as I had no idea where the shots were rebounding to. While I was looking around trying to find the puck that was sitting at my feet, a player would poke the puck into the net for the easy score.

The major difference I noticed between Sanders and myself was that he moved by instinct, anticipating where the puck would be shot. He was entirely fearless, sliding on the ice

like a seal, completely at home in front of his six foot by four foot cage.

The coach then picked teams for an intrasquad scrimmage. The players chosen to be on my "side" looked to be depressed as they realized they had a human sieve defending their goal. One defenseman skated by, hit my pads with his stick, and voiced his confidence in me.

"Just do what you can," he said.

The scrimmage went well, as my defense, fearing a sure score for the other team if anything even came near the goal, tightened up and didn't allow a clear shot for the opposition. The few times the puck did come dribbling my way, I jumped on it as if I were a kid finding a quarter in the street.

Despite my lack of involvement in the action, I began to gasp for air. Because of the speed of a hockey game, the goalie can never relax. While a soccer goalkeeper can take a breather during play, the hockey goalie is constantly repositioning himself. Before playing, I had believed the effort exerted by a goalie approximated that of a baseball pitcher; now I learned firsthand that the position is one of the most tiring in sport.

After 20 minutes of scrimmage, our rink time ran out. While the others warmed down with some sprints up and down the ice, I went back into the locker room exhausted and drenched in sweat, thinking NHL goalies are underpaid no matter how much they make.

As I later helped O'Donnell put his equipment into his truck, he invited me to make a return appearance sometime. Maybe he only asked because the team needed a goalie to give the shooters some confidence, or maybe he was only being kind. Perhaps he even saw a spark of raw goaltending genius in my play.

Whatever the reason, I'll never know.

"I think I'll stick with an easier sport," I said, "and take up marathon running."

—Erick Studenicka

Lane County Ice caters to skaters

Damian Jorgensen still remembers the first goal he ever scored in an ice hockey game, as a second-grader in Grafton, N.D., where kids are practically born with sticks in their hands and blades on their feet.

"I could barely skate," Jorgensen said. "I had a late start. There, people were skating a lot earlier than that."

But the inexperienced Jorgensen batted at the puck in his first game, and today he can still visualize all the kids around him fumbling on the ice, not knowing what to do. The puck seemed to have a mind of its own, as it scooted past the blades, knee-pads, sticks and elbows of defenders and teammates alike.

"The puck goes through everybody and just barely goes in," said Jorgensen, laughing at the memory of this movie-like scene of kids falling all over each other, while the unsure rookie scores in spite of himself. "I

think it was the only one I scored all year."

Fortunately for the Cold Ducks, the Oregon Club Sports ice hockey team, Jorgensen has improved quite a bit since those early years. The veteran right-winger leads the team into action during a 15-game schedule that runs until early March. Ten home contests at Lane County Ice are slated for the team as it tries to improve upon last year's 9-9 record.

But the 17 members of the University team are just a very small portion of the increasing number of local residents that have taken advantage of the county ice rink since its December 1989 opening.

Tom Bahls, manager of Lane County Ice and a former Cold Duck himself, said lessons are the best way to get accustomed to gliding on the ice, whether the participant is interested in developing the advanced skating ability necessary for playing hockey or just wanting some

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ACTIVITIES

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The results of the games are printed regularly in the Emerald. There is also a RIM hotline to call to get the day's schedule of events. The number is 346-4103. It tells who is playing and on which courts.

"I love to look in the paper after a great win and see my own team's name in print. Victorious again!" said Mike Sullivan, an intramural basketball diehard.

When a team is registered for basketball, it has a three-game season. All teams then enter a single

elimination playoff, which plays down to a final winner in each division.

There is a coed volleyball league winter term. It also offers special weekend tournaments. Look for the wrestling meet Feb. 15 and 16. The registration fee is \$2. Finally, there is a tennis tournament coming up in February. It offers singles and doubles competition for men, women and coed. The registration fee is \$6 for singles and \$12 for doubles.

Next term the big sport is slow-pitch softball. There are usually more than 100 teams. Three divisions of coed and men's, and one women's division

divide up the teams.

"Last season we all had a great time; it didn't matter if we won or lost. We weren't the best team out there, but we had the best time," said softball amateur Kelly Ray.

Outdoor soccer season also starts in the spring. Because of a lack of space, there will be only 48 teams competing. Be sure to sign up early for soccer.

Special weekend features spring term will include a tennis tournament, a track meet, a swim meet and a golf tournament at Tokatee Golf Course.

—Teresa Isabelle

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M-F 3:30pm-12:30am
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