

Sun, February 13, 2005

Ladies of the rings

For these girls of winter, Don Brennan learns, ringette is the game of their lives

By [DON BRENNAN](#), Ottawa Sun

Like so many other Canadians, the Mazeikis family is spending much of this winter weekend focused on a sheet of ice. That's Lali over there, sitting in the top row at Blackburn Arena, sipping hot chocolate and cheering on the Ottawa Ice Dogs with the other moms. Down the way and standing by himself is Andrew, the dedicated-to-detail dad (see below) who is video taping the game. And helping the Ice Dogs to a 9-0 victory over a visiting team from Cambridge are their precious daughters, Victoria and Olivia.

Yes, it's a typical minor hockey setting -- parents checking the scores of other games on a board in the lobby while kids who have just finished playing are now ordering slushies -- except the sticks used on the slippery surface don't have blades, the "puck" is made of inflated rubber and has a big hole, and the obvious rules differences include the necessity for skaters to pass it over each blue line.

LOVE AFFAIR

But the participants and their parents love it just the same, as if it was Canada's other game.

"This is our lives," says a smiling Lali, who is also team manager. "This is what we do."

The Ice Dogs, a Novice B team made up of 8- and 9-year-old girls, do it all so very well on this day. Victoria Mazeikis scores two goals (both assisted by fellow "Zeekster" Olivia), as does Alicia Hall and Nia King, while Leah Grimes, Lainie McConnell and Brion Hall add singles, and Madison Desrochers picks up the shutout.

The win improves their record in the 30th annual Gloucester Cumberland Ringette Tournament to 2-0, and continues their upward post-Christmas swing. The Ice Dogs, who play once a week, practice once a week and attend a power skating session bi-monthly, had only one victory and two ties in league action before Christmas. Since then, they have won 5-of-6 games and vaulted into first place.

Part of the credit could go to Andrew Mazeikis. While he would prefer the following doesn't get reported (he already is on the butt end of enough good natured teasing), passion like Andrew's should be recognized when there are still fathers out there who sit in the shadows and read magazines as their youngsters haplessly seek their praise by playing the organized sports of their choice.

Andrew not only tapes the Ice Dogs games, but he also breaks down film, counting shots on goal, takeaways, giveaways and plus-minus.

What's more, in this tournament he is serving as the team's advance scout. Earlier in the round-robin, Andrew went to see Cambridge beat West Ottawa 6-4 since West Ottawa usually has the Ice Dogs' number. After yesterday's win, Andrew joked that his scouting tips helped.

"He's a dedicated volunteer," coach Lane MacAdam says of his friend and neighbour. "The tape is a useful coaching tool."

Victoria and Olivia have been playing in the City of Ottawa Ringette Association for three and two years, respectively. They became involved through their friend Kirsten MacAdam (Lane's daughter) and part-time babysitter Katie Lugg, who plays on Team Canada and is their power-skating coach.

50,000 PARTICIPANTS

Ringette is now the sport of choice for 50,000 athletes throughout the country. First introduced in North Bay 42 years ago by Sam Jacks, it is played at many different levels and in national and international competitions. It has also spread to all parts of the globe, including the U.S., Finland and Sweden.

The Gloucester Cumberland tournament is the second largest of its kind in Canada, with 100 teams taking part.

Games have been played since Thursday at Blackburn, Earl Armstrong, Potvin, and two ice surfaces at Barrett and Orleans arenas. Finals will be held today in all age categories, from the young "bunnies" to the best Open AA adults.

Those who drop by any of the venues are sure to see some dedicated and passionate athletes and their families. And the proud pop holding the camera -- standing just down the way from the manager mom cheering on the Zeeksters at the Ice Dogs game -- will answer to Andrew.

don.brennan@ott.sunpub.com