

Junior A team takes ice in Plymouth

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The Hennessey Engineers' North American Junior Hockey League season opens tomorrow — that loud sigh of relief you just heard came from A.J. Baker.

It has been a long, long struggle for Baker and all others concerned with the Junior A club since Baker accepted the head coaching job after last season.

Talk about having to start from scratch. First thing Baker had to do was find a place for his team to play. The Engineers, the successor to the Redford Royals, moved out of the Redford Arena where it had played for nine years.

After an agonizing search, the Engineers were taken in by the city of Plymouth and will play their games out of the Plymouth Cultural Center.

Secondly, the club lost its financial backing. Hennessey Engineering, who had put up close to \$38,000 to run the club last year, backed out last June.

Baker set out, virtually alone, to find a sponsor. He's still searching. Meanwhile, the Engineers Hockey Club, in effect, has gone into receivership. The North American Junior Hockey League will allow the team to play this season. If no sponsorship is gained, it could be the Engineers' final season.

BUT THAT is in the background for now. Baker's attention, at last, focus on the ice. And happily, what Baker has on the ice is far more encouraging than the club's financial ledgers.

The Plymouth-Canton community should have itself an exciting Junior A hockey team.

"I'm very optimistic about this team," said Baker, who helped coach the team to a second-place finish last year in the four-team NAJHL. "We have two outstanding goalies and with some work, the defense will be strong. Our team speed is good. We're not big up front, by any means. But our defensemen make up for that."

Baker has brought together a solid mixture of experience and youth. He has six players back from last year, plus eight high school-aged draftees.

"Hockey Weekly Magazine made a big deal about the fact that we drafted a lot of high school players," Baker said. "They were comparing Midget AAA hockey to high school hockey in Michigan. They feel that Midget AAA is head and shoulders above high school."

"I disagree. If you put the top-notch high school players together,

they would have no problems competing with the Midgets. The trick is knowing where to find the top-notch high school players."

Baker ought to know. He organizes the annual All-Star High School Hockey Classic and keeps very close tabs on the high school talent.

"A LOT OF the players we drafted ended up going to college or are playing in Canada," Baker said. "But many players that had fallen through the cracks, the unknown quantities, ended up in our camp. Those players, even though they weren't drafted, will benefit our team and the league."

If a team's strength can be determined this early, the Engineers might be tough to score on. Goalies Dave Church, who played last season, and Doug Brown from Ann Arbor Huron are expected to be among

the league's toughest.

On defense, Baker has Tom Madden, Mark Harnes and Kirk Prieskorn back from last year — all three are physical and aggressive players. Todd Tamburino (Allen Park Cabrin senior) and Chris Kaske (Westland) are also expected to play key roles along the blue line.

Baker's biggest concern is whether the team will score goals. He is banking on the experience of Darrell Sattler (Trenton), Larry Pilut (Detroit), Steve Ramberg (Farmington) and Lief Gustafson (Lansing).

These are lake charge guys and I hope they will be able to provide some leadership for our younger players," Baker said. "Gustafson could be a big plus for us. He played on our fourth line last year, but he's worked very hard over the summer. He has a great shot and he's very intelligent on the ice."

BUT IF THE Engineers are going to take charge in the NAJHL this season, they will have to get production from their youth. And the leaders of that pack are Observant products J. Jewett (Southfield), Eric Kapelanski (Canton and Catholic Central High School), Sean Skinner (Livonia) and Chris Belhart (Plymouth).

"These guys can play, but it's a pretty big adjustment coming into Junior A," Baker said. "It may take a few games for these guys to get their feet wet."

The Engineers open their 40-game season this weekend in Chicago with a three-game series against the Chicago Patriots, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Their first home game is Friday, Oct. 17 against defending champion Fraser Falcons. Game time is 8:20 p.m.

hockey

THE ENGINEERS

BRAIN TRUST
Hugh Melvin — General Manager
Larry Paul — Director, Player Personnel
A.J. Baker — Head coach
Ken Sielmasch — Asst. coach

GOALIES
Doug Brown (Ann Arbor)
Dave Church (Flushing)

DEFENSEMEN
Tom Madden (Warren)
Mark Harnes (Lansing)
Kirk Prieskorn (Leslie)
Todd Tamburino (Allen Park)
Chris Kaske (Westland)
Dan Frantke (Houghton)
Mark Schallan (Detroit)

FORWARDS
LW — Darrell Sattler (Trenton)
LW — J. Jewett (Southfield)
LW — Eric Kapelanski (Canton)
LW — Sean Skinner (Livonia)
C — Larry Paul (Detroit)
C — Scott Marlewicz (Royal Oak)
C — Bryan Myrberg (Northville)
C — Chris Belhart (Plymouth)
RW — Lief Gustafson (Lansing)
RW — Gary Scott (Wayne)
RW — Steve Ramberg (Farmington)
RW — Jeff Smith (Lansing)

THE LEAGUE

The North American Junior Hockey League is the only Junior A hockey league in Michigan. The league is for players between the ages of 17 and 20. Teams may keep three 16-year-olds on the roster. The league has been in existence since 1975. It was formerly called the Great Lakes Junior A Hockey League. It became the North American Junior Hockey League in 1984 when teams from Buffalo and Chicago joined.

This year, the league features the following teams: Compuware (Oak Park), the Fraser Falcons, the Chicago Patriots and the Hennessey Engineers (Plymouth). Teams will also play games with Miami University, West Point and a team of Junior B all-stars.

THE PURPOSE

The North American Junior Hockey League exists for two reasons: to prepare players to compete at the college level and to provide players exposure to both college scouts and NHL scouts.

THE ARENA

The Engineers will play their 17 home games Friday nights at the Plymouth Cultural Center, located at 525 Farmer Road in Plymouth. The arena, which seats 1,200, is supervised by Chuck Gave and the Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department.

HOME DATES

The following is a listing of the Hennessey Engineers Junior A hockey team's home dates. The games are played at the Plymouth Cultural Center. Game time is 8:20 p.m.

Oct. 17	vs. Falcons
Oct. 24	vs. Compuware
Oct. 31	vs. Compuware
Nov. 7	vs. Chicago
Nov. 14	vs. Falcons
Nov. 21	vs. Compuware
Nov. 28	vs. Compuware
Dec. 12	vs. Chicago
Dec. 19	vs. Junior B stars
Dec. 26	vs. Chicago
Jan. 2	vs. Falcons
Jan. 9	vs. Chicago
Jan. 23	vs. Compuware
Feb. 6	vs. Falcons
Feb. 13	vs. Compuware
Feb. 27	vs. Falcons
March 6	vs. Falcons

sports shorts

COACHES NAMED

Farmington Public School District athletic director Ron Holland has filled the two varsity coaching vacancies at Farmington High School.

On Thursday Holland announced that Robert Kaump will take over as the boys varsity basketball coach and Al Beyer will head the boys wrestling program.

Both have served in the Farmington district as assistant and junior varsity coaches.

Kaump replaces Richard Roy and Beyer takes over for Barry Walsh.

SKI COACH SOUGHT

Farmington Hills Mercy is looking for a coach for its varsity ski-racing team. Any interested should call athletic director Ellen Sekera at between 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays at 476-2836.

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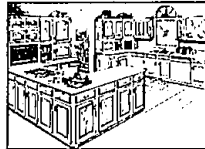
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