



Warner Middle School student Jeff Martin, 14, plays street hockey in the parking lot of Forest Elementary with a group of boys ages 11 to 17. The puck used was actually a light-weight plastic ball.

# Street hockey scores with rollerblading set

By Alison Wingblad  
special writer

**S**TRIKING PRO hockey players have hit the bricks, and some of their young fans have also taken to the pavement — but to play the game, not stop it.

The youngsters are playing street (or driveway) hockey, a game where cracked concrete or bumpy asphalt takes the place of smooth white ice, and sneakers and rollerskates replace bladed footwear. The game is catching on with 10-to-16-year-olds in the metropolitan area.

With plenty of help from the ultra-hot rollerblading fad, a renewed and growing interest in street hockey has been noted by people who provide equipment for such activities.

"We're seeing a lot more interest in it this year and a demand for the equipment by people who come into the store," said Robert Picard, owner of Robert Picard Sports in Farmington.

"And I even know of a group of three or four teams now in the Farmington Hills area that have been trying to get together and play against each other on weekends or whatever. It's definitely catching on."

APPARENTLY, this interest is area-wide. Says Tom Wright, a sales clerk for Imperial Sports in the Meadowbrook Village Mall, Rochester Hills: "It is a big trend all over subdivisions. We are sold out of rollerblades and hockey sticks right now."

"We sell a lot of plastic balls for street hockey, too," he added.

"Plastic balls? Isn't hockey supposed to be played with pucks?"

For the sake of those unaccustomed to the sport, specially made soft plastic balls — not pucks — are

generally the object of choice for street hockey players.

The low-bounce factor of the balls and ease of movement across pavement are vital for a quick-action game.

"Regular hockey sticks are used. Parents may be happy to learn that many of the kids are simply fitting their old splintered or chipped ice hockey sticks with inexpensive plastic blade replacements. Again, the plastic lends itself to better play on pavement and is durable as well."

But aside from the sticks and balls, it can cost a pretty penny to properly outfit a youngster for street hockey. That cost can be intimidating for some families, merchants said.

A sturdy, yet flexible, goal net, preferably made of PVC piping, is a must and costs about \$60. Protective equipment like helmets, gloves, knee and elbow pads, which many shop owners recommend, also adds to the bill quite healthily.

Parents can expect to pay \$20-\$75 for a helmet and an additional \$20-\$75 per set for protective padding.

Yet safeguarding players from injuries is a concern, Picard said.

IN FULL AGREEMENT is another store owner, Frank Mrowczynski, of Bloomfield Sports Shop, Bloomfield Hills.

"As a parent myself, I'd suggest helmets and gloves, definitely. Kids can get hit playing this, but if they are wearing the right equipment, that can really help," Mrowczynski said.

And perhaps the biggest bite is the cost of rollerblades. They can run upwards of \$130 for a decent pair.

Of course, some players have gone the simple route, opting out of the pads, helmets and, in some cases, the

rollerblades themselves. Instead, they merely "play as they are," using their regular shoes for the game.

"And many seem to enjoy the sport just as much."

Jeffrey Fischer of Farmington, who at 6 is a few years shy of the other street hockey players, said the name of the game is fun. According to Fischer, there is no shortage of that when he is shooting and scoring with a group of his friends on his driveway.

"I play because I like it . . . especially when I score," he said.

In fact, the street hockey bug seems to have bitten the whole Fischer family. Fischer's mom, Karla, said she and her husband, Terry, and their younger son, Matt, 4, often join in on the fun.

"I think it's a wonderful way for the kids to spend their time. They are outside, keeping busy and having fun," she said. Fischer adds that she certainly sees street hockey as a growing trend.

Whether the trend will continue is yet to be seen. Picard said that since it's a sport generally enjoyed by youngsters, it is really hard to tell what the future holds for the sport's popularity because kids often go from one thing to the next.

"Ten years ago, if you had told your kids they would be playing outdoor hockey on the street wearing something called rollerblades, they would have said, 'You're crazy,'" Picard said.

So for now at least, the boys will keep on skating and scoring out on the pavement.

And in case you're wondering what signals the end of a game, perhaps Rochester Hills youngster Dan Lynch, 12, sums it up the best.

"We play until it's time to go home."



Wade Hirschman, 11, strikes a pose for the camera during the after-school game. The kids said their parents paid anywhere from \$50 to \$200 for their roller blades.

# Ordinance leaves couple hanging on their fence

By Tom Daer  
staff writer

Good fences make good neighbors, a New England poet once said. Around here, those fences had better comply with all local ordinances. Then you'll have the Farmington City Council for a good neighbor.

That was what council seemed to be telling residents Dale and Sally Smetek during its regular meeting Monday evening. After about 35 minutes of discussion and debate — and a variance request denied, 3-1 — council left it to the Smeteks to somehow alter their new wooden fence one foot so it would meet city standards.

The 75-foot fence, installed in September by Randolph Fence of Farmington Hills, stood five feet tall, 12 inches over code. The overage didn't escape the eagle eye of an inspector.

So the Smeteks asked the city for a variance and appeared before council Monday to plead their case.

"I don't think the city council wants to be unreasonable," said councilman Richard Tupper, "but the ordinance is clear."

Added councilwoman Joanne McShane, "We must let everyone know what our standards are."

ONE PROBLEM is that no city permit was taken out for the project. Dale Smetek claims that the installer, Ken Bauer, told him no permit was needed as long as the new fence was the same height as the one it replaced.

Council's arguments about maintaining city standards didn't sit well with the Smeteks, especially Sally.

"I ride around Farmington a lot," she said, "and I see a lot of unsightly things . . . three or four boats. It isn't fair to do this to us."

In denying the variance, council gave the Smeteks six months to bring their fence up — or down, in this case — to code. The Smeteks, 14-year Farmington residents, said they're looking at their options.

"One is changing the fence," said Dale Smetek, a manager at Unisys in Plymouth. "Another is to appeal the denial of the variance."

Mayor Bill Hartscock voted against denying the variance, and mayor pro tem Arnie Campbell was absent.

# Committee selects theme for drug awareness month

Plans are underway for this year's October Drug Awareness Month in the Farmington area.

A committee of various community leaders and volunteers has selected "Alcohol and Tobacco — The Most Abused Drugs" as its 1992 theme, and activities are already being planned for the four-week pe-

riod designed to educate the public about drug and alcohol abuse nationally.

The kick-off breakfast for the Farmington area is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 1 with Penny Norton, prevention coordinator for the Mid-state Substance Abuse Commission, as the keynote speaker. Her topic will be the influence of advertising.

The month will again include distribution of red ribbons, various business fund-raisers, and activities in the schools and area churches.

One of the ideas being touted by the group is a "Smoke Out Day," which could involve not only schools but the entire community, organizers said.

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