

Observing SPORTS with TOM DONOGHUE

Hockey death touches heart of entire area

A galvanized three ounce rubber disk, one inch thick and three inches in diameter, spelled death for a 13-year-old Livonia hockey player.

The Michigan hockey scene, the entire Livonia area and a certain bantam hockey team were struck by death with the James Phillips family robbed of its most cherished possession.

John Phillips' life was cheated short by that three ounce disk - a life snuffed out after only 13 years.

"When death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the pining spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it," wrote Charles Dickens in *Bleak*.

Death hit John Phillips unexpectedly, while playing his favorite sport for the Slator Bantams in a state tourney at Warren Arena.

"It was a freak accident," commented the Slator Coach Howard Slator. "John was checked to the ice in front of the opposition's net and at that moment one of boys let go with a shot from the blue line. Jon lifted his head, with the puck striking him in the back of the neck.

The 13 year-old Lowell Junior High student died a few hours later of a broken neck.

The Slator team went on to win the contest, 14-0, over Livonia, not aware of their teammate's fate.

"I learned of John's death after the game," said the Slator coach who informed the kids in the locker room after the game "that John would not be playing with us anymore - that he had died."

"I then had to leave the room and let the kids have the atmosphere to themselves. About 10 minutes later I returned and we decided to withdraw from the state tourney."

"But we got a phone call from Mrs. Phillips and she wanted us to continue in the tourney because John would have wanted it that way."

The Slator team went on to win the next three games and win the tourney and in these few days with the funeral and cemetery walk approaching, Coach Slator commented that he watched his entire team of 13 and 14 year - olds turn into men.

A memorial fund has been started in honor of the Phillips boy and all No. 10's in the Slator hockey association have been retired.

"The team is really a close bunch," added the Slator coach. "Nobody could sit down afterwards and reason out why it had to or did happen."

John's older brother Paul, a senior at Livonia Churchill, decided to hang up his skates after the accident.

"Paul just decided to turn in his uniform," said the Churchill High hockey coach Adam Mitchell, "and I couldn't blame him one bit."



STEVENSON GOALIE Curt Downs kicked away 33 shots in pushing the Spartans to a 5-3 victory over Franklin in the George Gee championship finale. (Staff photo by Tom Donoghue)

It was the week of the George Gee pro hockey tourney and Paul turned in his uniform to Coach Mitchell but asked if he could still be part of the team - a team that would probably have had John on the roster in two years.

The Slator Bantam crew brought home its state tourney trophies minus one player, and instead of turning out for a celebration feast - it was time to pay tribute and last respects to a teammate and friend.

I went to the funeral home without knowing what to write about or just what to ask his teammates.

After conferring with the coach, I was given the opportunity to talk to the heart statements from his fellow 13 and 14 year - old friends:

"I just can't stop from crying - it just doesn't seem right. Why did Johnny have to die?" "Johnny looks like he is happy where he is now and he sort of has that expression on his face that he would like to get up and check somebody."

"We are going to bring home that national trophy for Johnny. We are playing for Johnny now and are going to give it all we have and then some - we loved Johnny."

"Johnny was just a great guy and boy, did he ever love ketchup. He could eat and drink ketchup all day. I don't think I'll ever be able to forget what has just happened."

"We love that Johnny and his parents - his mother is like a mother to all of us. I sure do hope the team can still find a place in her heart."

"I can't believe it - I have just lost my best friend and I just can't figure out why. Why - I just don't know."

These were some of the remarks that came out of the very solemn 13 and 14 year - olds. The following day Johnny was buried with his No. 10 uniform and his state tourney trophy with him.

There has been some question of whether John's brother Paul should have made a quick decision to quit hockey - never to play again the game that took the breath away from his brother.

Paul and only Paul is the only person that could decide and find it in his heart - a heart that has been torn because the game he loved took his brother's life.

One said that Johnny would have probably wanted his brother to continue on.

This is something that will only be answered by a research of the heart and a glance at the grave that has uniform No. 10, a hockey trophy and a 13 year - old hockey player.

George Gee Tourney

STEVENSON'S CHURCHILL'S (Semi-final game)

STEVENSON 3 CHURCHILL 5

FIRST PERIOD
SCORING: Stevenson - Dillane (Vermech), 4:45; Stevenson - Ship (McMurry), 10:40; Churchill - Vesey (Trax), 14:09. PENALTIES: McMurry (5), 4:36; Fox (C), 1:40; Fox (McMurry), 4:40; Hiltz (5), 4:40; Ship (5), 5:09; Ship (5), 7:31; Meyers (C), 10:20; Vermech (5), 11:11; Fox (C), 11:19; Parks (C), 11:20.

SECOND PERIOD
SCORING: Churchill - Trax (Vesey), 1:41; Stevenson - Dillane (Graham), 7:00; Churchill - Vesey (Trax), 8:44; Stevenson - McMurry (VanVeseman), 8:54; Churchill - Vesey (Trax), 10:04. PENALTIES: Fox (C), 4:21; Ship (5), 5:09; Hiltz (5), 8:51; Trax (C), 10:10; Dillane (5), 10:40; Fox (C), 10:40; Fox (C), 11:19; Dillane (5), 11:20.

THIRD PERIOD
SCORING: Stevenson - McMurry (unassisted), 8:22; Stevenson - Hiltz (unassisted), 8:54; Churchill - Fox (Parks), 7:31; Stevenson - Vermech (McMurry), 11:31; Stevenson - Hiltz (McMurry), 11:40; Stevenson - Dillane (McMurry), 11:46. PENALTIES: Ford (C), 4:32; VanVeseman (5), 6:32; VanVeseman (5), misconduct, 4:31; Lett (C), 7:52; Selma (C), 11:40; Fox (C), 11:51; Thayer (C), 11:51; Hiltz (5), 11:51; Vermech (5), 11:51.

FRANKLIN 4 BENTLEY 3 (Semi-final game)

FRANKLIN 3 BENTLEY 3

FIRST PERIOD
SCORING: Franklin - Garbett (Lavery), 8:17; Franklin - Lett (Jenkins), 11:11; Bentley - Nason (the vent), 11:31; Bentley - Nakewick (McLean), 14:54. PENALTIES: Berta (F), 9:40.

SECOND PERIOD
NO SCORING. PENALTIES: Garbett (F), 11:19; Berta (F), 11:19.

THIRD PERIOD
SCORING: Franklin - Lavery (B. Jenkins), 6:17; Bentley - Sobola (Stevens), 11:04. PENALTIES: Andersen (B), 1:12; Lett (F), 9:40.

FIRST OVERTIME
NO SCORING. NO PENALTIES.

SECOND OVERTIME
NO SCORING. NO PENALTIES.

THIRD OVERTIME
SCORING: Franklin - Knet (Franklin), 5:05.

STEVENSON 5 FRANKLIN 3 (Championship game)

STEVENSON 5 FRANKLIN 3

FIRST PERIOD
SCORING: Stevenson - Dillane (unassisted), 6:32; Stevenson - McMurry (unassisted), 8:56; Stevenson - Dillane (McMurry), 10:36. PENALTIES: Lavey (F), 1:40; Vermech (5), 4:23; Lett (F), 11:41.

SECOND PERIOD
SCORING: Stevenson - Dillane (unassisted), 8:22; Franklin - Garbett (Lett), 8:54; Franklin - Knet (Lett), 11:31; Stevenson - Dillane (McMurry), 11:31; Stevenson - Vermech (McMurry), 11:40; Stevenson - Dillane (McMurry), 11:46. PENALTIES: Lett (F), 1:41; Dillane (5), 11:22; Ship (5), 11:22; Lett (F), 11:22.

THIRD PERIOD
NO SCORING. PENALTIES: B. Jenkins (F), 1:41; VanVeseman (5), 2:40; Vermech (5), 5:32; Franklin - Lett (5), 7:52; Vermech (5), (penalty and subject), 11:31; Ship (5), 11:31; Berta (F), 11:31; Franklin (F), 11:31.

Turf Tips, Quips

By Doc Minard

Northville Downs may not set the world on fire with its nightly average mutuel handle but the fact remains that the suburban half-mile plant wound up its winter meeting with plus percentages for wagering and attendance.

That just has to be something different for this section of the country at this time of the year.

The 'Downs showed an 11 per cent increase at the mutuel machines with a nightly average of \$306,080 compared to the \$272,345 of a year ago. Thus, with all the talk and the hubbalo of the tremendous season at Windsor, one finds that Northville did quite well for itself even with its unfavorable location.

Where Windsor actually reported a slight dip in attendance, the 'Downs showed a two per cent increase with an average of 3,126 compared to the 3,087 of 1973.

Thus, despite the fact that it was operating on Sunday afternoons and had a matinee and night doubleheader on Saturdays, Windsor didn't make the major inroads that one would have thought.

All of which brings to mind that Michigan could just about shut down Windsor if Wolverine Raceway or Hazel Park would accept winter dates and furnish the competition necessary to make the Canadian track say "uncle."

There may be a time in the not too distant future when Michigan will provide that kind of competition for its Canadian rival, a time when Sunday racing is legalized, when thoroughbreds will give Windsor a battle for the betting dollars. When that happens then we say Windsor will have to pull in its ears and drop back to second rate programs. That's where it would be right now if it wasn't for the American dollars going through the mutuel machines.

Getting back to the final night at Northville which brought out a number of interesting things.

In the first place the tickets paid a big \$7.212 to the three lucky ticket holders and that represents the biggest payoff in the track's history for that gimmick. Then there was a \$1,096.30 price on one of the perfectas to keep the longest betters in a happy mood.

And would you believe it, Ardens Rader won a \$2,750 pace in 2:05.2 by three lengths and that was the fastest closing of the entire meeting and another boost for the fine work of George Rattenbury in getting the half-mile racing surface in top condition.

Rex Putnam, of Davison, sat out the final night of racing and backed into the driving championship with a winning percentage of .491. It was his first title and he built up a big lead over second place Russ Nye, of Toledo, on the first two nights of the week ... then coasted in.

Nye had to win his two starts on the closing night to move past Putnam but was quickly eliminated when he finished second in the third race and that was it.

Youthful Charley Smith, the 19-year-old Northville driver who still carries a provisional permit, was the winningest reinsman with a total of 32 firsts, almost double that of his nearest rival.

Charley's feat is all the more remarkable when one considers he was just learning how to drive a year ago and now is ranked as one of the most promising youngsters to develop in Michigan in a long time.

Hazel Park opened its 82-night season Thursday with a crowd of 6,826 in the stands and a total handle of \$630,809.

That was quite a bit below the 10,000 figure of General Manager Harold Duris but then the weather wasn't that good either. The wagering was almost double the \$315,833 at Northville Downs the night before.

Strange as it may sound, several of the winners were horses that had just shipped cross-country from Northville a few days before. These included: Guy Army (\$24.80), Star Reporter (\$12.80), Para B (\$20), Moon Bonnie (\$25), and Timely Mortgage (\$11.20).

All of which kind of makes one believe the stock at Northville Downs wasn't as bad as many folks would have you believe.

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Area roller skaters capture novice titles

Michael Oliver of Plymouth and his partner, Karen Kullian of Garden City, skated to first place honors recently in the artistic roller skating, sub-novice dance division of the Indiana - Illinois open invitational meet held at Melrose Park, Ill.

They were among several area skaters winning honors against nearly 150 other competitors from a six state area. The U. S. Amateur Roller Skating Assn. sanctioned the meet.

Oliver also took second place in the sub-novice boys free style and novice boys figures. Karen won first place in girls free style and figures.

Other area skaters placing in their divisions were: Cindy Hurley of Westland, first place in ladies dance; Laura Coleman of Westland, first place in novice girls free style and ladies pair free style (with Diane McIntyre); Debbie Kullian of Garden City, first place in novice girls figures; Melissa Mazie of Garden City, first place in juvenile dance (with Patrick McCarthy); Doug and Phyllis Hall of Garden City, second place in intra dance; and Debbie Kullian, sub-novice dance (with Jerry Hautman).

All the local skaters are members of the Lakesview Figure and Dance Club of Brighton.

Plymouth grad voted captain

Shortstop Pat Cunningham of Plymouth has been voted one of the tri - captains of the 1974 Kalamazoo College baseball team.

He missed last season due to participation in the college's foreign study program. Cunningham was co - captain of this year's hornet basketball squad and recently received all - MIAA honorable mention recognition.

The Kalamazoo baseball team will return this week from an eight - game pre-season trip to Alabama.

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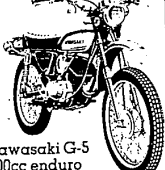
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