

Offense carries the day in summer



STEVE KOWALSKI

Some people use swimming as a retreat from the heat of summer.

A.J. Baker offers another way to beat the heat.

The Metro Summer Hockey League, founded by Baker, finishes its 11th season with tonight's 8 p.m. championship game at the Plymouth Cultural Center where temperatures hover in the 80s on game nights.

Wear a jacket and long pants and get ready to see a lot of goals scored.

The MSHL has quality goal-tending but in the summertime, even defensemen like to showcase their offensive skills. "There's shots galore from every single angle," said Broncos goalie Steve Tratechud, a recent Farmington Hills Harrison graduate who plays for the Lakeland Jets Junior team in the winter. "People who walk in probably think it's a football game."

The MSHL isn't for washed-up players.

Some MSHL alumni include the Los Angeles Kings' Mike Donnelly (Livonia Franklin) and Warren Rychel, the Washington Capitals' Todd Krygier and the San Jose Sharks' Mark Beaufait (Livonia Stevenson). Some of the best current players include Garden City's Joe Burton, Wayne's brother tandem of Jeff and Jim Mitchell, Redford's Jim Hubenschmidt and Livonia's Scott Lock and Jason Weber.

Baker gets help from his

mother Edna Baker but for the most part he is the MSHL commissioner, secretary and treasurer wrapped in one.

The 1977 Redford Union graduate started the MSHL when he was in his prime as a player but hung up the skates about three years ago to concentrate on coaching.

Baker, who played two years of semi-pro hockey in Sweden after graduating from Eastern Michigan University, played in a summer league in the late 1970s and early '80s at the Detroit Skating Club in Bloomfield Hills.

"A lot of players from Ann Arbor and this side of town thought it was too far to play so I called up the (Plymouth) arena, contracted some ice time and they've been extremely accommodating to us — just super," said Baker, who is the assistant manager at Dearborn's Canfield Arena.

Never too old

The league draws players from all over the Greater Detroit area and they range in age from 15 to 34. The 34-year-old is Gary Rye, a pipe fitter who lives in Romulus.

"It doesn't bother me — age is a state of mind," said Rye, who shares the goalie duties for the Wildcats with 22-year-old Rich Nagy.

Rye played two years of hockey as a teenager but didn't play again until he was 30 for good reason.

"My parents and I moved to Arizona and the ice melted," Rye said.

There isn't as much hitting in the MSHL but there have been a

few memorable moments.

There was the time a few years ago when a player was ejected for a major slashing penalty with five minutes remaining in a game. The half-dressed player returned to the ice with less than a minute left to join a skirmish in front of the net.

"The guy happened to attack his head out of the locker room, he still has his skates on and the next thing I know here he comes running on the cement, sparks flying, and he climbs the glass," Baker recalls. "He bee-lines to the net looking to hit anything in a different color jersey. It turns out, the guy who was coaching his team got out there before (the player) can start whaling on somebody."

The players in the MSHL are serious about winning but some offer pretty funny excuses for missing games.

"Some guys on Sunday end up at the beach, they're having a good time and not going to leave at 4 o'clock for a 6 o'clock game," Baker said. "Most do it on Saturdays but a few like to go to the beach on Sundays as well."

No favoritism

Baker's team, the Spartans, have reached the championship game three times but never won. He usually has help at the start of the season drafting players but this year he divided up players by himself.

Judging by the Spartans regular season record of 4-6-1 and a first-round knockout in the playoffs, Baker wasn't stacking his side.

"Why do that and then take a bunch of crap from people?" Baker said. "It would be too easy."

Baker is the only full-time coach in the eight team league. He is seeking corporate sponsorship (about \$1,500) so the league could afford to pay full-time coaches.

"It would be nice to get somebody to keep the benches organized every game and see that the players get equal time," Baker said. "Somebody who could input some knowledge — especially to the younger guys. I got a call today from a mother of a 15-year-old (Plymouth's Ed Kruschka) saying how thankful she was for us giving her son a chance to play. That made my day."

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Duane Roe added two goals and three assists.

Kevin Brady was the winning goalie.

League commissioner A.J. Baker, who coaches the Spartans, isn't sure the Bulldogs are heavy favorites.

"The Wolverines played with 10 guys for the last few games and they got sort of comfortable with a short bench and not have to rotate 14 or 15 guys," Baker said. "I've seen that happen a number of times. It should be a very good game. Both teams have quality guys who are very level-headed and win or lose will have a good time."

HUSKIES 10, REDSKINS 8: The Huskies won their first-round game against the Redskins on Monday at Plymouth.

Marc Chiappelli and Grant Patterson had three goals each. Chiappelli added four assists and

Patterson had three. Scott Lock scored three goals and two assists for the Redskins. Teammate Dave Weaver contributed one goal and four assists.

WILDCATS 11, SPARTANS 8: Kevin O'Connor scored four goals and the Wildcats overcame a 7-5 deficit after two periods to knock the Spartans out of the playoffs in the first round Sunday at Plymouth.

O'Connor scored three goals in the third period when the Wildcats outscored the Spartans 6-1. Also scoring in the third period for the Wildcats were Steve Senterfit, Kevin Matejko and Ed Kruschka.

James Mitchell (Wayne) scored five goals and Brian Hann added four assists for the Spartans.

WOLVERINES 12, BRONCOS 4: Jim Hubenschmidt scored four goals to lead the Wolverines to a victory Sunday and into the second round.

Golf tournaments at Kensington

Kensington Metropolitan Golf Course will be the site of a junior golf championship on Friday, Aug. 6. The entry fee is \$3.50 per player plus greens fees.

Players will be flighted by age (12-under, 13-14, 15-16 and 17-18). Fees and applications must be received one week prior to the tournament. For information, call

313-685-9332 or 1-800-23-GOLF-4.

A two-person best-ball tournament will be Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 7 and 8, at Kensington Metropark.

The entry fee is \$18.50 per person and includes greens fees. Applications and fees are due Saturday, July 31. For information call the above numbers.

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