



C.J. RISAK

Hockey violence: Issue that needs to be addressed

For hockey fans in Plymouth and Canton, this week could be — should be — the beginning of something beautiful. Something long-awaited, impatiently anticipated.

But there's something sour in the mix. And face it, folks: If you don't get rid of it, if you continue to accept and ignore, the whole game could collapse.

The positives

•The hometown team, the Plymouth Whalers, accomplish something none of its predecessors has done. The Whalers complete the regular season with not just the best record in the Ontario Hockey League, but with the top ranking in the entire Canadian Junior Hockey League (which includes the Western Hockey League and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, as well as the OHL).

Home-ice advantage is guaranteed throughout the playoffs, which got under way last Sunday.

•On Tuesday, the Plymouth-Canton school board considered whether or not to make hockey a varsity sport at Canton and Salem high schools. It took two years to put together a proper proposal; although it was tabled by the board, the general feeling is, with school superintendent Charles Little's endorsement, the proposal will pass and hockey will become a varsity sport.

The negatives

While hockey continues to grow in support throughout the area — Northville/Novi, Farmington, Walled Lake and Redford school systems have all initiated prep programs in the last few years; in Plymouth, two new skating arenas have opened in the same time span, and Canton is considering another — there is something wrong, some cancer that is spreading with it.

And even the most adamant of hockey supporters, those who joyfully pack their youngsters into vans for Saturday morning pee wee games, are finding it increasingly difficult to dismiss the role it plays in their sport.

Violence.
Depending on your viewpoint, the timing was merely unfortunate. Or purposeful.

The story that appeared last week in *Sports Illustrated*, written by Jeff MacGregor, detailed perhaps the worst incident in the Whalers' franchise annals. In the last game of the 1998 season, Jesse Boulerice — with a baseball-bat swing of his stick — knocked Guelph opponent Andrew Long unconscious. Long suffered a broken nose, several facial fractures, a concussion, two black eyes and a gash that stretched across his upper lip.

Here the Whalers are, a year later, closing in on a high-point in their history — and they are forced to deal with one of the worst.

Certainly some see it as unfair, a franchise still being held accountable for the actions of one of its former players. Many of those fans continually insist that this is just an isolated incident, that it has been blown so far out of proportion that objective focus is impossible.

But in final analysis, these opinions must be secondary to the main problem.

It all stems from fighting, and the hockey hierarchy's endorsement of it. Is fighting a necessary ingredient in the sport?

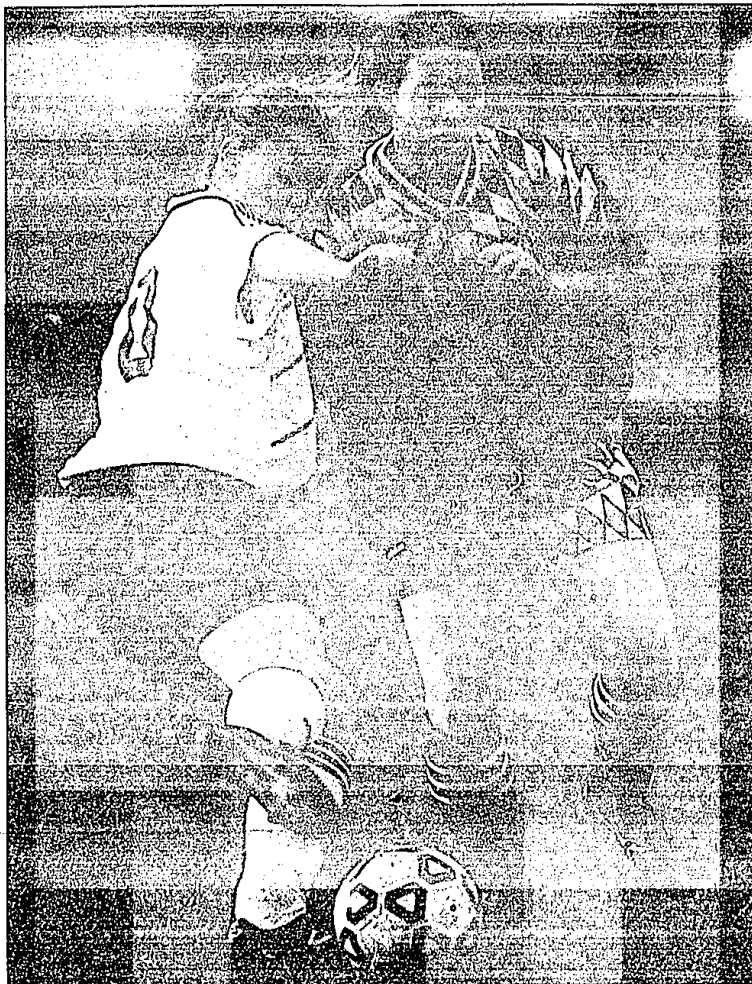
Most fans say yes. They love to see players drop their gloves and haul the jersey of an opponent over his head, all the time pummeling him until one, or both, drop to the ice.

How many times have you heard this condoning explanation: *It's all part of the game.*

Nonsense. Fighting is an integral part in the fans' definition of hockey. It's something they enjoy. It has nothing to do with the game itself. Hockey can be played without fights.

Do you think the Boulerice stick-bombing was necessary?

Please see RISAK, C6



STAFF PHOTO BY SHAWN LAMONT

Returning players: Farmington's Lorianne DeDomenico (left) and Harrison's Lauren Liebowitz compete for possession of the ball last season. Both are key returning players for their respective teams.

Hawks positive entering new season

BY RICHARD SHOOK
STAFF WRITER

SOCCER

Experience is a great teacher, especially when your girls soccer team is a member of one of the state's toughest leagues.

Farmington Harrison coach Glenn Breuhan figures his Hawks will be better this season by virtue of the youth of last year's squad.

The team compiled a 3-9-3 record in the Western Lakes Activities Association.

tion, one of the state's premier soccer leagues.

The Hawks had just four seniors last season, but one, Jodi Schulz, was injured and missed much of the year.

"The two we lost were really good players," said Breuhan, who brings his 13th year of coaching at Harrison.

The two key contributors who graduated were midfielder Janino James and stopper Tiffany Nelson. James not only played midfield but also defender and marking back.

"This year we have a more experienced team, especially the 10th graders," Breuhan said. "Last year we had a real good crop of freshmen and, with that experience, I think we're going to be a much improved team."

Reginn Bander, a second-team, all-area sweeper, "will be the backbone of our defense," Breuhan said. "She also plays striker; she's that good."

Junior Emily Jackson will play center-midfielder. "She's the quarterback of our team," Breuhan said. "She's a very skilled player."

Also returning for the Hawks is striker Danielle Strickland, the team's leading scorer a year ago. She's one of the freshmen to whom Breuhan gave prominent roles last season.

Please see HAWKS, C5

Falcons hopeful in 1999

■ Farmington High School, after a winning season in girls soccer, is planning to have another good year.

BY DAN O'MEARA
STAFF WRITER
domeara@oc.homescomm.net

Coach Bob Neff remembers the game well, and his players no doubt do, too. It was the last one played by the Farmington High girls soccer team last season.

In a district tournament final, it was midway in the second sudden-death overtime, and the Falcons were locked in a scoreless tie with Birmingham Groves.

The game ended in the 104th minute when Norah Conney scored the only goal for Groves, which went on to win the Division II state championship two weeks later.

Despite the disappointment and frustration of that night, the game might also be viewed as a source of optimism for Farmington.

If the outcome had been different, it might have been Neff's team, ranked No. 2 at one time and No. 8 in the final poll, that won the state title.

"Nobody gave them a contest like that all the way to the state championship," Neff said.

The Falcons hope to be in position to contend for such lofty goals late in the 1999 season, which begins Tuesday when Farmington plays host to Groves Pointe North.

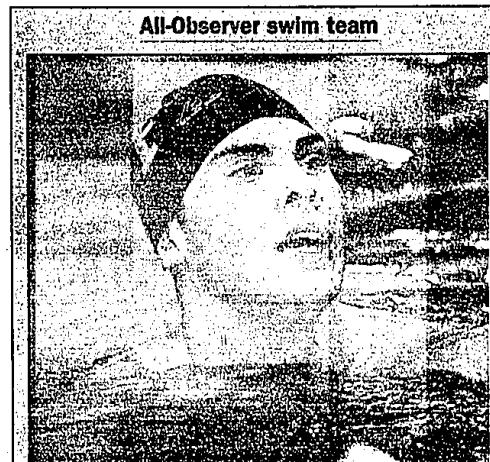
Neff, whose team finished last season 9-6-2, has sufficient talent and experience returning to believe the Falcons could challenge in the post-season and better their record.

The list of veteran players begins with senior Emilie Villemonte, an all-state and All-Observer midfielder who led Farmington in scoring with 21

Please see FALCONS, C5



Emilie Villemonte



STAFF PHOTO BY SHAWN LAMONT

Area star: North Farmington senior Matt Zald is a repeat member of the All-Observer boys swim team. See Page C5.

Whalers whip Windsor in OHL playoff contests

HOCKEY

Nothing wasted.

The Plymouth Whalers have begun their trek toward an Ontario Hockey League championship with a pair of routs over first-round opponent Windsor in games that exhibited Plymouth's superior offensive and defensive abilities.

The latest was a 6-0 shutout Tuesday at Windsor Arena. The Whalers led 2-0 after one period and 5-0 after two, with five different players accounting for their goals. Indeed, Plymouth had nearly as many goals as Windsor had shots in that span (eight).

Robert Holsinger got his second-straight win, but had to make just 13 saves. In the Whalers' two wins, Holsinger has allowed one goal and made a total of 31 saves.

Defenseman Mike Tachios finished with two goals and an assist to pace the Whalers. David Legwand, Shaun Fisher and Adam Colagiacomo added a goal and an assist/apiece, and Troy Smith scored a goal. Damian Surma and Jason Ward each contributed two assists.

The Whalers opened their OHL playoff series against the Spitfires with an 8-1 trouncing Sunday at Compuware Arena. Windsor was playing its third game in three days, with a playoff victory over Kitchener Saturday clinching a playoff berth for the Spits.

But they could not recover quickly enough for the rested and ready Whalers, a team that had lost a week earlier at home to Windsor by a 6-1 count. There would be no repeat; Plymouth scored three times before the Spits could retaliate, and that proved to be only a minor blip in the Whalers scoring surge.

Harold Druken was the key for Plymouth, scoring three goals and assisting on three others. He spent them out, too — he had a goal and an assist in every period.

Adam Colagiacomo contributed two goals and two assists for the Whalers.

Please see WHALERS, C6