



Goalie Doug Handler learns about "position" hockey at the Red Wing Oldtimers school

Oldtimers teach hockey skills

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One of the coolest places to be on these hot August days is learning hockey skills on an indoor rink.

With the proliferation of indoor ice rinks in American cities, youngsters can learn the game without a thought to the weather outside. In the past few years, hockey schools have popped up in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

The Red Wing Oldtimers School instructs nearly 400 youngsters (eight to 16 years of age) in Southfield, Farmington and Livonia. The school holds three one-week sessions in each city. Farmington youngsters use the new Novi Ice Arena. Cost of the school is \$65 per student.

The Oldtimers school stresses basic hockey skills.

"The purpose is to teach basic hockey," said Jim Kokowicz, an instructor in the school. Like most of the instructors, Kokowicz is a former professional hockey player. He played for Detroit in the early 1940s.

"To begin with, we work with their individual skills, primarily skating and the stick skills. From there, we build into basic positional play."

LATER IN THE week-long session, the students engage in what Kokowicz calls a "controlled scrimmage."

"If we see that a particular move was called for and wasn't made, then we stop the whole thing (scrimmage) and point out the possibility."

Skating skills are "about 80 percent of the game," according to Kokowicz.

Most hockey coaches would agree. "But the kids around here can skate," Kokowicz said. "The big problem we see is a lack of fundamental knowledge of how the game should be played in its positional aspects."

Kokowicz said response to the school, both in terms of enrollment and attitudes to the teaching methods, has been excellent. "Any kid introduced to hockey has found it to be a fascinating game," he said.

Hockey has gained popularity in the past several years. The popularity is reflected in the increase of junior hockey programs and teams.

DESPITE THE success, Kokowicz believes that too much of a good thing—even hockey—can be harmful to a young player.

"Sometimes some of these boys become too enthused, and their parents get carried along with them."

"They (the parents) have a tendency to lose their sense of perspective. As a result, they'll have the boy become a specialist at far too early an age," he said.

Many young hockey players partici-

pate in year-round leagues. That could be harmful to both the player and the sport, according to Kokowicz.

"I think these younger boys should be introduced to all sports. When they get older (and more proficient) then they can make a decision as to what they want to specialize in. If you play hockey for 10 or 11 months of the year, it gets to be like a job."

"What sometimes happens is that some of the good kids are played too much in their younger years. When they reach the time when they should make their move toward junior hockey, the interest is gone."

THE HOCKEY students will be funneled into recreation and travel leagues in the various cities. The Southfield Hockey Club, for example, has leagues for Mites, Squirts, Bantams and Midgets. League play begins around the end of September.

In addition to Kokowicz, some past and present hockey professionals in the school include Jim Peters (Montreal Canadiens, Boston, Detroit), Norm Smith (Montreal Maroons, New York Americans, Detroit), Joe Klukay (Boston, Detroit, Toronto), Gord Haidy (Detroit), and John Wilson (presently coach of the Michigan Slags).

The former hockey players enjoy teaching the skills they learned through years of NHL experience, according to Kokowicz.

"It's a funny thing," he said. "They just enjoy it. They enjoy being able to pass on what they know to the kids."



Eric Freedland finds a way to keep cool on a hot summer day

"If you play hockey for 10 or 11 months of the year, it gets to be like a job."

--Jim Kokowicz



Old pro Gord Haidy instructs a young student

Photographs by Craig Newman