

# Mosinee hockey - a 40-year tradition

by Glen Swedlund

Hockey's coveted Stanley Cup has been abandoned several times over the years, ranging from a boot into a canal to being left along the roadside.

Hockey folks in Mosinee can relate. Their first and favorite victory plaque once made a similar trip to the trash heap.

Over the years, Drengler's Tavern on Main Street had provided a home for all the cherished Mosinee hockey trophies, including the wooden plaque proclaiming "1949 Hockey Champs."

In the mid-1970s, the bar changed hands, and long-time Mosinee hockey supporter Bob Schipferling was told to move the awards.

After collecting all the trophies in sight, he inquired about one that no longer hung on the wall in its familiar spot. "I thought that was a piece of junk," the proprietor replied. "It's out back in the trash."

Schipferling anxiously scurried away, hoping he had beaten the garbage man. He had.

While the incident may not match the disgrace to the symbol of ice hockey supremacy, it was a close call for those who admired the 1949 team's accomplishment.

As humble and the homemade award may be, it represents the beginning of a rich tradition of Mosinee's excellence on the ice.

"It was the most treasured one of them all. It was the first one," explains Schipferling, who has been the voice of the senior men's Papermakers and high school Indians for the past 20 years.

With the Mosinee Hockey Association celebrating its 40th birthday this month, the plaque will be an apt reminder of the sport that has worked its way into this community's blood, and won its heart.

That first championship team reigned over the Vacation Land League, winning 19 straight games.

That came only a year after Mosinee organized into a competitive team.

George Goldsmith, Stanley Grzadzielewski, Florian Kuklinski, Bob Rieck, Jim Daublender, Bob Crotteau, Harold Walters and Herb Kell, with the help of many others started the program.

World War II had just ended, and the long cold Wisconsin winters were again reality to the men returning to Mosinee.

Goldsmith took it upon himself to organize a group.

"My wife and I sent out penny post cards to about 13 or 14 guys and I asked them if they'd like to play," he recalls.

Walters, a former goalie for the Wausau team, took the job as coach.

"We just wanted something to do in the winter time," said Goldsmith. "A whole bunch of guys — we all got together — and we all got to playing, and he scheduled some games with other cities."

Walters acquired some old Wausau team uniforms.

"We turned the W upside down, and made it an M," said Goldsmith, with a laugh.

"Walters lived on Half-Moon Lake and we shoveled off part of the river, and that's where we practiced."

That first year, Mosinee played about a dozen games, and the next year they found sponsors who helped buy new uniforms.

"We sewed the different names of the sponsors on our backs. We kind've advertised for 'em," said Goldsmith.

A tradition began to take root — a winning tradition at that — and the sport kept growing in Mosinee.

"I think most of the kids I played with got their kids playing. We'd get 'em skating young."

The second year the Mosinee paper mill became the major supporter, and the Papermakers were named. They competed with the likes of Wausau, Stevens Point, Eagle River, Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls as well as Stambaugh and Bruce Crossing, both in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

"I don't think we were that good but I always thought of hockey you could get your second wind," said Grzadzielewski, who is the Marathon County Board Chairman.

Starting with the 1952-53 team, Mosinee piled up a record of 73-12-4 over the next five years. That included four league championships and state titles in 1954 and 1957.

In 1957 the Papermakers went 19-2-0 while Grzadzielewski scored 28 goals and 17 assists. He was on a line with Ralph Fochs and Jim Kreig. Together they accounted for 47 goals.

The Papermakers also won the league title the next three years, and took home another state championship in 1960 with a mark of 24-1.

As the years rolled on, so did Mosinee's spoils. While the Papermakers last won the state title in 1976, they played in the 1983 and 1965 championship finals.

Florian Kuklinski coached that team, which featured his three sons Gary, Tom and Jeff. The goaltender Larry Peterson, is the current coach.

Florian Kuklinski, who also started the Mosinee youth hockey program in 1962, passed away in January of this year. He along with Kell, Grzadzielewski and Schipferling have all been inducted into the Wisconsin Hall of Fame.

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