

RANGERS ON ICE?

Wouldn't it be something if the University of Wisconsin-Parkside had a hockey team? Pucks flying about, the sound of steel on ice as players slide to very quick stops amidst showers of frosty shavings... that would be something.

Before we go too far, some of our earliest alumni may already be saying: “We had a hockey team!”

And they would be right. More than 40 years ago, a group of young men who had played youth hockey in Kenosha during the 1960s began playing at the brand new university on the north side of Kenosha.

Brent Podlogar, '84 chemistry, remembers it well. His dad, Ludvick, was the coach. Young Brent and his brother Kurt were thrilled to gather up broken sticks, bag up the practice pucks, and soak up a game their father grew up loving in his native Canada.

“In about 1970, my father was informed by a neighbor that a group of kids – instrumental in putting Kenosha hockey on the map in the late '60s – was playing hockey at this ‘new college’ down the road,” Brent recalled. “As my father is a boastful, proud Canadian, having met and played hockey with the likes of Ted Lindsay and Gordie Howe, he doubted that real hockey could be done here in the States.”

When Ludvick expressed his doubts to the neighbor, a friendly challenge was placed on the table. “Go out and teach these kids the correct way to play hockey’. It was a challenge my father accepted,” Brent said.

Ludvick Podlogar expected to see a bunch of rag-tag, undisciplined teenagers playing a brand of pond hockey. What he found, Brent said, was a group of highly skilled and motivated young men, with a desire to learn and unafraid to work hard to achieve success.

“My father immediately accepted the opportunity to coach the new UW-Parkside team and—ironically—hoped he wouldn't be wasting their time,” Brent said. “He coaxed his best friend, Bruce Reber, to help him as the assistant coach. Bruce accepted, despite the fact that he did not know how to skate, and showed up at the first practice with figure skates. He took a lot of ribbing for that.”

Tom Krimmel and Bill Westerlund founded the club team and were co-captains on the early squads. Krimmel is now vice president for development, family and alumni relations at Olin College of Engineering in Needham, Mass. He had previously worked for UW-Parkside in alumni relations. Westerlund is a regional manager for SuperValu in Pleasant Prairie, Wis., and lives just east of the UW-Parkside campus.

“The support Tom and I received from Tom Rosandich, athletic director, and Russ Coley, assistant athletic director, gave us the inspiration to do what had to be done,” Westerlund said. “It was a rare combination of personnel that created fond memories for a group of men enjoying one of their favorite sports.”

Ludvick Podlogar coached the team for three seasons. “The commitments involved with raising four boys and work prevented him from continuing on,” Brent said. Krimmel coached the team for one season (1974–75), and the Ranger hockey club team played its final campaign in 1975–76.

At least three players from the Rangers helped start what became the Milwaukee Admirals. Brent recalls that two Rangers played on the inaugural Admirals’ team – known originally as the Milwaukee Wings, an amateur hockey club.

Brent Podlogar remembers the team operating on a shoestring. The tight budget may have developed what former UW-Parkside Sports Information Director Steve Kratochvil remembers as the team's enterprising spirit. “The game programs had loads of advertising,” Kratochvil said. “I think they even had some arrangement with the Playboy Club in Lake Geneva. They also had skating cheerleaders.”

The Rangers practiced during the week at Wilson Park in Milwaukee and played home games there. Members of the team paid for the ice time out of their own pockets. On weekends when the Rangers were not playing at Wilson Park they traveled to face teams such as Marquette, Illinois State, and St. Norbert.

“As an 8-, 9-, 10-year-old, traveling and being by the team, with these gigantic players playing a physical game—for me it was the enormity of the experience,” Brent said. “I was fascinated by the games, how quick they went and how big the players were.”

For a team that did not have its own hockey facility, the Rangers were no pushover. “Forty years ago this month we were wrapping up an 18-2-1 season for UW-Parkside hockey,” Krimmel said.

Not bad for a new team from a new school.



BRENT AND SUSAN PODLOGAR



UW-PARKSIDE HOCKEY TEAM

