

Tuesday January 29, 2008

## Cool girls

### 80 girls scrap in I.F. youth hockey

By CLARK CORBIN

ccorbin@postregister.com

If you didn't see the pink hockey gloves flying at you, there's no way to tell the check came from Abby Lehto and not one of the boys on the ice.

Like many of the 80 girls playing this season in the Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association, 9-year-old Abby started playing the game at 3.

"My dad (Mike) just said go try it and see how you like it," Abby said. "When I first stepped on the ice, I fell and had to use a chair to balance. I was kind of upset with my dad for putting me on the ice when he knew I couldn't skate."

Since then, Abby has spent seven years improving her skating and her game.

And she isn't afraid to mix it up with the boys and crash the boards in local coed leagues.

"Yeah, I love playing with the boys because you can actually hit," the Sunnyside Elementary School fourth-grader said.

Although Abby kicked off her season Friday with the all-girls, 12-and-younger Idaho Falls Eagles team, she has skated with boys for years.

But, as the Eagles will tell you, hockey isn't all about bone-jarring hits.

There is no checking in all-girls games and the team focuses on offense and defense, passing the puck to open skaters in front of the net and making fluid line changes to move new players onto the ice.

"Actually, what I would like to work on is skating backwards," said 10-year-old Miranda Wachs, a Westside Elementary School student. "If you're a defender, it helps you get to the puck easier and go faster."

Twelve-year-old Eagle Rock Junior High School student Gaby Batalden is a tough goalie for the Eagles. She suffered a concussion earlier this season. Even so, she said there is no



Erika Mattson watches the play during a U12 girls hockey game Friday at the Tautphaus Park ice rink. - Aaron Rosenblatt / Post Register



Aaron Rosenblatt / Post Register - Cheyanne Garcia fixes her elbow pad before Friday's U12 girls hockey game.



Aaron Rosenblatt / Post Register - U12 girls hockey players gather for a cheer during their game Friday at the Tautphaus Park ice rink.

reason to think of hockey as a boys-only sport.

"You just need to know that when you get hit, it's not going to be so bad and you can get right back up," she said. "But it's really so much fun, the coaches help you so much and the game moves really fast."

Features writer Clark Corbin can be reached at 542-6761.

Girls

hockey facts

The Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association started its girls division in 1996.

There are three types of teams -- Under 19, Under 14 and Under 12.

The IFYHA competitive girls travel team is the current state champ for Idaho.

Two Idaho Falls teams will travel to Boise on March 28 for the USA Hockey Rocky Mountain District tournament.

On the Net

Information about girls, coed and boys youth hockey in Idaho Falls:

[www.ifyha.com](http://www.ifyha.com)