

Tuesday February 12, 2008

Hockey celebrated across America

By **CHRISSE ZEHRBACH**

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Hockey programs around the country, including Idaho Falls, will participate in Hockey Weekend Across America this weekend.

"The purpose is to bring more recognition to the sport," Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association President Bev Hott said. "So (people) know it's out there and it's a great place for the kids to be. ... All organizations are supposed to participate in one way or another."

USA Hockey's objectives, according to the group's Web site, www.usahockey.com, are "to celebrate our game and all involved in the sport throughout the nation using all means possible" and "provide opportunities for those who haven't played hockey to try it, resulting ultimately in more people playing our game at all levels."

Hockey Weekend Across America begins Friday and runs through Sunday, with a different local event each day.

Friday is wear your jersey to school day.

Saturday is bring a friend to the rink day. The annual Armed Forces Day game will also be from 7:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Saturday.

And Sunday, Idaho Falls hockey will honor its local heroes. On the list to be honored in I.F. are Joe Marmo, Wayne Lehto, Sally Ward and Bill Harrie.

Marmo started the hockey program in Idaho Falls in 1964.

"Joe Marmo is the one that started it, and I came into town a couple years later," Lehto said. "We had about 12 to 15 hockey players at the time, and over the years we built it up, and at one time we had close to 500 youth hockey players. What really set things off was the artificial ice in Tautphaus Park."

When the existing rink was built, it was named after Marmo and Lehto because of their contributions to the program.

"When it happened, it was a complete surprise," Lehto said. "And naturally, I'm honored and pleased that they would recognize Joe and I for our contributions to youth hockey."

Ward played a big role in helping raise finances to get the rink built, and Harrie has coached in the program since the '60s, mostly teaching beginners how to skate.

"It's an established institution right now in Idaho Falls sports," Lehto said of the hockey program, adding that anything to promote hockey is good for Idaho Falls' program. "It has just grown and is sure to stay."

A mite tournament will also be held at the Joe Marmo-Wayne Lehto Ice Rink at Tautphaus Park on Saturday and Sunday.

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Tuesday Q&A

Bill Harrie

Bill Harrie moved to Idaho Falls just in time to get involved with the budding hockey program. And although he'd never played the sport himself, he'd done quite a bit of skating and loved it.

Harrie took his two sons through the program and later coached his grandson. Even now, at 75, Harrie is still teaching the kids of Idaho Falls how to skate and play hockey.

Harrie sat down with Post Register sports writer Chrissy Zehrbach to discuss the evolution of the program, the Mites and the MOOCH group in a weekly feature we call the Tuesday Q&A.

Post Register: Did you grow up in the area?

Bill Harrie: No, I didn't. I was born and raised in Wisconsin. We had an opportunity to come to Idaho in 1957. Both the wife and I worked for Sacred Heart Hospital, which was one of the original two hospitals here. We've been here ever since June of '57. So we kind of feel like we're becoming natives.

PR: Did you grow up playing hockey?

BH: Well, I never had an opportunity to play hockey per say because back in the '40s and early '50s there was no organized hockey in the dairyland where I was raised. So we had quite a few ponds and sloughs -- what they called little ponds of water -- in the area. When they would freeze over in the wintertime, why we would do a lot of ice skating. And we did wear hockey skates. A lot of them back there wore the speed skates, but for some reason we always managed to get hockey skates. So we skated a lot. And you know, three or four friends of mine, we'd walk over to the pond and we would smash a pop can or a vegetable can of some type and use that for a puck, and cut some limbs off of some trees and get a little hockey game going -- what we knew as hockey.

PR: So did you not get involved in coaching until you moved here?

BH: Right. When we got to Idaho Falls in '57,



of course, there was no organized hockey until Joe Marmo organized the program, initiated it in 1964. My oldest son was 7 years old at the time, and when I saw the notice in the paper that (Marmo) was trying to organize a program, why I was interested in getting my boy involved in skating. So when I took him down to sign up, Joe asked if I had ever skated. And I said, "Well, yeah, I have skated. But I've never played hockey." And he said, "Well, I don't worry about that. I can teach you how to coach, but if you know how to skate that's the first goal." So that's how I got involved and started to coach.



PR: You've been here since the start of the Idaho Falls hockey program. How have you seen it evolve?

BH: Well, there's a long evolution through the last 44 years since it started in '64. Of course, when Joe started the program, the city provided the boards. And the city donated the old rodeo grounds, which is down on Rolandet just below where the current hockey rink is. And we learned real quick that trying to make ice in an old, established rodeo grounds is a very difficult chore, mainly because of the type of soil and the manure that has accumulated. The ground warmed when the sun shined on it, and actually, brown spots would start seeping up through the ice. So we only spent, I think, the first two years down at the rodeo grounds. And then we decided we needed to find a better area. So that was when we moved up near where the permanent building is now. And of course we relied on natural ice, so we had to wait until the ground froze, which was usually in November, maybe early December. We had a fire hydrant about 50 to 100 feet away from the place where they had the boards set up. So we would roll out the fire hose and try to flood to get ice started every fall. ... As the year went on, of course, if it stayed cold we usually built up a real nice rink. ... So for these kids that are playing nowadays, it's a little different ballgame than it was back then. It got a little bit easier as we got into the artificial ice.

PR: So how did we get to the permanent structure?

BH: After we had the program going for three or four years, why some seasons we only had a couple of weeks of skating. Because it was either too warm to actually get the ice started or it might be January before we could actually get a sheet of ice. And then if the sun was out why it was hard to keep that frozen. So after some fundraising and some funding through the city, we managed to get a slab of concrete put down, which is where the existing rink is right now. That way the city could see the boards up on that slab of concrete and it was easier to make ice. But it was still natural ice. And it wasn't until 1969 that we had enough funds to go ahead and put a cover on to protect it from the sun. And that extended our season quite measurably. In the ensuing years, we managed to raise enough funds and the city helped with putting the sides on and building the restrooms and the locker rooms and the warming hut. Then I think it was in the mid-'80s when they managed to get enough funding to put the permanent artificial ice on the concrete slab where the building is now. So they've made some modifications and improvements since then. But it took a span of a number of years to get to the facility that we have now.

PR: What is the MOOCH group?

BH: One thing that was very beneficial to the program was that in 1969, Sally Johnson, one of the parents, organized what they called the MOOCH group, which is Mother's Organization of Coach's Helpers. And that organization, I don't

know if it still goes by that name, but it's very well organized and continues to be a great asset to the program. And I'd like to give Sally Johnson credit for that. Why, between she and Joe, everyone was involved and everything got done. Some of the duties that the MOOCH group performed were administrative duties to assist the coaches. And so that gave the coaches more time to concentrate on actually coaching the kids and keeping the program going.

PR: As I understand it, you've coached practically every level.

BH: Yeah. My younger boy got involved the second season when he was 6, and my older boy was 8. So as we worked up through the program, of course, more boys were joining all the time. Originally we started with 20, and each year their friends would decide they wanted to skate or to try it. So the program grew quite rapidly, really. And by 1976, we had about 240 boys. So that expanded the divisions as the years went by because every two-year increment they'd move into the next group. So it was kind of customary for the coaches to move up in the divisions as their boys moved to facilitate the ease of getting them to practice at the same time. It just seemed to be the thing to do, and it worked out the best.

PR: Was it after your boys left the program that you focused on coaching the Mites?

BH: Yeah. After 1977, when my youngest boy graduated, I dropped back down and I coached the Squirt travel team for a few years because I had some friends that were parents that asked me if I would do that. So I did that for probably four or five years. And then I decided, because Joe was still involved coaching the Mites. He needed some help in the younger divisions. So I decided that traveling was getting to be a little bit much, and I moved down and helped Joe for a number of years before he had to drop out of the coaching game. But I continued on with the Mites. And then my grandson was born in 1983. So by '88 I decided to get him involved in skating. So I worked through the divisions with him. And then he graduated from the program in the year 2000. So that's when I dropped back and continued coaching the mighty Mite again.

PR: What's it like to coach the little kids who are just learning?

BH: You know, it's such a fantastic feeling. And that's what's really kept me interested and involved in coaching because those little 3-, 4-, 5-year-olds, they are so cute on the ice. When they fall, they jump up. And they'll try anything. And some are timid, some are real aggressive. And you never know what they're going to be. It's just a real challenge, and it's so gratifying to watch the improvement, even in a few weeks' span, of what things they'll learn and how they'll develop.

PR: Have you retired from coaching?

BH: No, I'm still coaching. I'm not sure how much longer I'll continue. Each year I think, "Well, maybe this outta be the year." But it's amazing, kids that were just getting started when we started the program, they now have either children or grandchildren that are in the program. So, as an example, one of the boys that came through the program by the name of Mike Snyder that has a boy that's 5 years old, I believe now. I've pretty much turned it over to Mike. ... He has learned a few different techniques and is a very good skater himself, so he's very innovative and knows how to keep the attention of the younger 3- and 4-year-olds because he identifies with them much better than I do at the stage I'm in. When he's gone, of course, then I take over and run the practices. There's usually ever year maybe two or three or four that have come through the program that have young ones starting. And the nice thing about getting them

involved is that they understand the principles and the philosophies that Joe Marmo initiated and that us older coaches have stuck with through the years. So that's what keeps me involved. But at 75, why, I don't know how long the body can do it.

PR: Why do you continue?

BH: I've been involved in Grid Kid football and Little League baseball, and those were great programs. But somehow hockey has really piqued my interest and I've never played the game. But I enjoy skating and it's so gratifying to watch the boys develop and improve their skills. At the start of the program there were four main goals, and Joe kind of set the tone for this. He said the first three goals are all have fun. One, two and three: Have fun, have fun, have fun. And the fourth goal is to teach the boys to skate. And whatever develops beyond that point is kind of up to the individual child.

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youth hockey coach