

# The fun of losing large: the Bruins' early years

by Alexis Dobranowski

In 1976, Ian O'Connor of Uxbridge Minor Hockey Association sent a cheque for \$20 to the Ontario Hockey Association to enter a team into the OHA Junior C League.

The Uxbridge Dominion Autos became the town's first Junior C team, entered in the Central Ontario league for the '76-'77 season.

Roger Ashenhurst was the team's manager.

"It helped the community because we used a lot of local players," he said. "There was a strong juvenile team."

In 1975, the Uxbridge Minor Hockey Association juvenile team had a strong season, making it all the way to the finals, so coach Bob Pollard and Roger Ashenhurst wanted to bring the team up and play Junior C.

Wayne Cordingley, 50, played on the Dominion Autos that first season. At 20, he was the oldest player. Wayne had been playing Junior C for the Port Perry Mojacks for three years.

"Uxbridge didn't have a Junior team, so a lot of guys were playing out of Port Perry," he explained. "(The Uxbridge team) was built out of a solid midget team, a good juvenile team and a bunch of players playing for Port Perry."

Wayne returned from the Mojacks to play his final eligible year in Uxbridge because he's from Uxbridge. And though the

Dominion Autos weren't a real threat on the scoreboard, the rivalry with Port Perry began that first year.

"We were a new team, so we took a few good beatings that first year," he remembered. "When we played, there weren't as many Junior C teams, so we played against the big centres like Lindsay and Cobourg. They are A teams now."

Wayne credits the perseverance of a few locals with the birth of the team.

"Bob Pollard and Roger Ashenhurst were the backbones that brought the team to this town," he said. "If you want to give credit where credit is due, it'd be to Bob, Roger... Dorothy (Pollard). A lot of people worked really hard to get a team here."

Kevin Brookhuis, 48, remembers the first team try-outs.

"There were probably about 30 guys there," he said. "I was pretty confident but, you're never sure, so I was a little nervous. Once you are on the ice though, it's OK."

Kevin had played with Bob and Roger for years, he said, and they had urged him to try out. He was honoured when he was asked to be the first team captain.

"I was quite surprised," he said. "There were a lot of senior guys on the team, so I thought they'd ask one of them. I was really honoured."

Kevin explained that the idea in starting a Junior C team was that the core of the strong juve-

nile team would move up together. But, the team lost a couple of key players so, they weren't as strong as they'd hoped.

"I don't know if we even won a game that first year," Kevin laughed. "It was hard after such a strong juvenile year. We had really built up a fan base - the arena would be packed for our (juvenile) games. So, I think we were a bit of a letdown to them."

Kevin remembers scoring his only hat-trick in his Junior years in a game against Bowmanville.

"We lost the game 21 to 3," he laughed. "But, I got all three."

But, he added, the team never lost its spirit.

"We just wanted to play. The losing didn't matter. Everybody still showed up to practices and games," he remembered. "Nowadays, if a team's losing, kids will lose interest. But, we all kept showing up."

Kevin played on the team for three years, one as an overage (each team is allowed one player that is over the 20-year-old age limit). He never wore a Bruins jersey: the team changed its name the following year (in 1980).

Neil Evans, 49, also played on that strong juvenile team and moved up to the Dominion Autos. He said it was a "big thing" around town to play Junior C.

"It wasn't celebrity status. We got beat pretty bad that first year," he said. "It was a struggle."

But, he added, it was still pretty fun.

"It was pretty exciting back in those days. The Lindsay and Port Hope games were on the radio," he explained.

Neil remembers one game versus Port Hope, when Cliff Catherwood took an opponent into the boards and broke the doors, delaying the game for nearly two hours.

"Well, I wasn't listening, but the guy on the radio was going crazy trying to take up airtime while he waited," Neil laughed.

Neil also credits the hardwork of the Uxbridge Minor Hockey Association and several local residents.

"Bob, Roger, the Van Kessells, they had to put a lot of time into starting the team," he said. "There are a lot of costs with running a Junior C team, Bob had to be careful with the money. You've got to build it just like an expansion team. It's great to see the Bruins doing well now."

The club took about five years to become competitive, and the 1990s saw the club really strengthen, winning several Central Ontario championships.

Neil still goes to the Uxbridge Arena to cheer on the Bruins on Friday nights. He's also been involved with the organization, as assistant general manager and assistant coach.

Kevin, now living in Toronto, is also involved coaching and playing hockey. He said while the city has a hockey communi-

ty, it's not the same as his Uxbridge years.

"It's different. It's smaller because there's so many other activities to do," he said. "It's just not the same as small-town hockey."

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1st Vice: Don Morrison  
2nd Vice: John Van Kessell, Sr.  
Secretary/Treasurer: Ian O'Connor  
Directors: Don Taylor, Bill Barton, Al Tozar, Bert Corbett, Spike McNair, Garry Harrison, Klaus Bayard, John Van Kessell Jr., Roger Ashenhurst, Keith Paradine, Bill Webb.

## PS

Notes from Denny Gray, team manager during the 1990s. (These notes, dated 1995, were found in a box of Uxbridge Bruin paraphernalia.)

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