Men's Hockey Looks Back at Championship Season

Column by Mike Purucker
SPORTS WRITER

Last week's New England College Hockey Association Division II North championship victory ranks among the highest achievements in MIT team sports over the past decade. The men's hockey team's performance produced a sense of pride and excitement seldom seen on the MIT campus, and the student body responded with large crowds and boisterous support. Included among the team's numerous fans are President Charles M. Vest and Athletic Director Renee N. Filipps, each of whom shared in the celebration of the team's success.

Yet even the excitement of the team's most ardent fans could not match the satisfaction of the players and their sense of accomplishment. MIT made the jump to Division I in the NECHA following last year's Division II championship; their success in higher division took everyone by surprise. But the Beavers are legitimate champions, and they clearly outplayed their opponents in last week's tournament and throughout the season, a feat of the team's strongest attributes this year was leadership among both players and coaches. Coach Joe Quinn's knowledge and motivation were essential in providing the players with the will to win. Assistant Coaches Bill McBrine and Tom Keller inproved individual players' skills on the offensive and defensive ends, respectively. The Beavers were unanimously generous in their praise of the coaching staff, and cited it as a large factor in their success.

The coaches in turn pointed out that MIT had the most talented team in the league. The "Bruise Brothers" line of Mike Mini '93, Rob Silva '93, and Nick Pearce '94 completed their second full season together, averaging a combined six points per game. In addition, they set a physical tone on both offense and defense, often intimidating their opponents into changing their style of play. Gene McKenna '92 was a multi-threat as an offensive defenseman who was equally effective anywhere on the ice. He mixed his speed and flashy demeanor with the leadership of a tri-captain. Mike Quinlan '92 solidified the defense when he recovered from injuries early in the season, and was a quiet leader as another tri-captain. Aaron Krieser '92, the third tri-captain, excelled at penalty killing and demonstrated a heart and desire that rubbed off on his teammates. John Simmons '95 stepped in as a freshman and provided excellent goal-tending. He consistently came up with the big save at crucial moments in many games.

Several experienced players contributed to the team's success with their presence both on the ice and in the locker room. Having played at the Air Force Academy, Noel Meter '92 contributed superior playmaking skills and all-around leadership. Alain Curodeau G added an element of breakaway speed and offensive firepower. Graduate students Mike Fouse, John Cluising, and Dale Viscenci consistently produced big goals and defensive plays, often in high-pressure situations. Mike Amante G was a locker-room comedian as well as a solid goalie.

In reality, however, many players not mentioned above made substantial contributions to the team's success. Everyone from the leading scorers to the role players helped to create the tremendously positive atmosphere in the locker room. Each player stepped up during the course of the season to score a goal, kill a penalty, or take a check when the team needed it. The Beavers' championship season was indeed a complete team effort. Of all the team members, captains McKenna, Krieser, and Quinlan best exemplified the team concept. Quinlan said, "This is the closest team I've played on—hands down.

Krieser added, "My sophomore year, there was no unified team thing. MIT won only three of 20 games that season (1989-90), but in 1990-91 this season's 20-4 record included many first-time accomplishments, among them the MIT Ben Martin Tournament Championship.

An early season game at WPI was an indication of the team's spirit and combustion ability. "Coming from behind beating WPI early in the year [was a big win]," Quinlan said. "There was something about winning that game... everyone knew we could beat anybody when we did that." Later in the season, a first-ever win over Suffolk provided another confidence boost, and a brutally physical victory over CCRI solidified the Beavers as a formidable opponent.

But the lasting image and most important ingredient in the Beavers' success was in unity. Krieser mentioned that this closeness was fostered not only through working hard on the ice, but also in the locker room and socially outside the risk. Whether it was a post-game party at Baker House or a quick meal at Nick's Beef & Beer, this team enjoyed being together. Their closeness off the ice unquestionably led to increased success on it. McKenna summarized it best when he said, "After my sophomore year, someone said to me 'I heard the hockey team doesn't get along too well.' [Now.] everybody really gets along well, and that's what really made the difference.

PHOTOS BY PANDU MISTRY
Top: Nick Pearce '94 and Gene McKenna '92 celebrate Junior Mike Mini's goal. Middle: President Charles M. Vest joins the post-game celebration at Baker for the triumphant men's hockey team. Bottom: Alain Curodeau G watches as his shot sails by the WPI goalie in the final of the New England College Hockey Association Division I tournament.