

Ice Chips 2011 – A Player’s Perspective



I read Bryan Gruley’s feature on the 2004 World Pond Hockey Championship in the Wall Street Journal and knew immediately I had to go. Now, seven years and six trips to Plaster Rock later, the desire to keep going back has only grown stronger.

When Danny Braun asked me to write this article I was humbled and honored. When he suggested I think of it as a "one-pager" about my experiences here, my first thought was, how could I possibly fit all that on just one page?

I started thinking about what Pond Hockey means to me and how special the memories are. First and foremost I think about my teammates. A good pond hockey team isn’t just about hockey. Chris Lockrem, Ari Chopra and Scott Frerichs aren’t just great hockey players, they’re great teammates and friends. The best move I’ve ever made in Pond Hockey was getting those three to be my teammates. As GM of our team, the MTV2-Headed Dogs, I handle logistics like sponsorship and travel. In games I turn it over to Chris’s skating, Scotty’s goaltending (size 12 skates, yikes) and Ari’s scoring, so I can pass, dig hard and play defense, while concentrating on my crucial role as team ambassador in the beer tent after games.

The games are all fun but the competition gets tougher every year and during Sunday’s playoffs we play to win. Locals we met in Perth Andover our first night in 2005 soon became friends and they helped push us through those tough games early on. They were rooting us on and sharing the advice that only locals can. In 2007 we made it to the Finals but lost to the Danglers in a tough, close game. We’ve shared lots of great memories during Pond Hockey but pulling together to battle through five games in a row that Sunday and facing the Danglers is the one nobody will ever forget. It was a long day of hockey and one of the most special experiences any of us has ever had. The support from volunteers, friends and hundreds of people watching the games was incredible and kept us motivated and focused all day. I was reading some old articles preparing to write this and found a quote from Ari that I think sums up how we all felt after the final: “My hip hurts a little bit and my head’s bleeding, but I feel phenomenal.”

Only at Pond Hockey could losing a championship feel OK.

That’s because Pond Hockey is about so much more than just the games. The overall experience includes memories that I’m sure ring true for a lot of us in some way. We’ve seen games played in ankle deep puddles and then cancelled due to rain; driven through the night in a blizzard racing to get home; run out of gas on the way into town just two miles short of our hotel, the Perth Andover Motor Inn; feasted on ham steaks, poutine and homemade pies at amazing local restaurants that quickly became favorites; overcame three different cases of severe frostbite thanks to -35 temperatures that included an EMT once saying “well, I guess you can play...;” tried on a Stanley Cup ring at the bar sometime after Midnight; and gotten to know some of the friendliest, most hospitable people you’d ever be lucky enough to meet.

Then there's the experience of being part of something you know is completely magical. There's something a little indescribable about the feeling you get skating onto the shimmering lake for that first game under the lights. Everyone coming out of the tent with eager anticipation to the sounds of steel cutting and sticks banging against the ice. If you're lucky and there's a little snow falling, well then it's just about perfect. Last year someone asked me why I liked being there so much. I looked around the new pavilion and my answer was right in front of us. There were 500+ people playing and countless others volunteering and watching that shared the same interests as I did. We all love hockey and love being around it. It's great going back every year to make new friends and catch up with old ones in town and on teams like the Y.A.N.K.S., the Dangers, Team MOE, Alberta Shamrocks, ESPN, Raggedy Ass River Boys, Caymen Breakaway, NY Boars and countless others.

On top of everything, Danny and the volunteers keep making the event better every year. Who else could build a new rink and pavilion, run Olympic style opening ceremonies, bring the Stanley Cup, Bobby Hull, Hockey Night In Canada and the Prime Minister to Plaster Rock, all while working through the night to resurface the ice so every morning starts with crisp, clean sheets? I can't wait to see what they have planned for this year's 10th Anniversary.

To everyone that makes Pond Hockey possible, you have my sincerest appreciation and admiration. You make dreams come true and for that I'm eternally grateful.

I look forward to seeing everyone on the Pond.

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