

The Daily Dose

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Community

Life



Photo Illustration by Mike Greenlee/Staff photographer

JOHNNY McGRORY, 22, of Solvay, plays for the Labatt Blue Light team in the Syracuse Inline Hockey Association.

Summertime Hockey

A hot version of a cool game

By Meghan Rubado • Staff writer



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"Scrape, slap, BOOM."

The sounds of a puck making contact with concrete, hockey sticks and Plexiglas echoed through the Sunnycrest Ice Rink in Syracuse on a recent Thursday evening.

But the whirl of wheels on a hard surface is the signature sound of a noisy sport that unites the 120 members of the Syracuse Inline Hockey Association. The league has been around about 10 years, though it's had a few different names and leaders.

At a glance, it might look just like the sport on ice. But the players know better.

"It's much faster," said Colin Massulik, operations manager for SIHA. "The puck stays in motion. There are very few stoppages. That's what makes this game so exciting."

Massulik, 31, of Clay, started playing in the league a few years ago, but he's been skating (on ice and inline skates) for much longer.

"I'm an average player," he said. "It takes a long time to get good at this sport."

SIHA owner Pat Favalo, 32, of East Syracuse, refereed and played pick-up in the league in its early years. A 1996 car accident prevented him from playing on a team. He quit playing altogether when he took ownership of the league two years ago.

Eleven teams play this year. Each team plays twice a week.

Each player pays \$180 to participate. They range in age from 17 to 47. They include accountants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, college students and construction workers. Some had never played hockey before joining the league. Others play only roller hockey. Some play ice hockey and roller hockey.

All this season's players are men. But in past years, women have played, and they're certainly welcome, Favalo said.

Favalo handles organizing the players into teams and scheduling games, tournaments, special events and charity fund-raisers. He also referees. For Favalo and Massulik, the league is basically a second full-time job during the weeks surrounding the first games of the season. Favalo is a category development manager for Sara Lee Corp. Massulik works in computer support on Macintosh computers.

The league has a Web site (www.syracuseinlinehockey.com) that's packed with information.

It sells merchandise with the league logo. It even has its own public access television show. SIHA has more than a dozen sponsors. Each team bears the name of a sponsor, including Labatt Blue, G.M. Crisalli & Associates, Shifty's, Cheap Seats and the Syracuse Crunch.

Aside from all those extras, SIHA is a lot like any other athletic league, said Matt Saur, who plays goalie for the Shifty's team.

"There's a lot of camaraderie between the players," said Saur, 24, of Syracuse. "It's social. It's more fun than anything else. Of course, it's still always competitive."

Saur is a special education teacher at Lincoln Middle School in Syracuse. He's an assistant coach for Corcoran's hockey team, the same team he played starting goalie for from 1995 through 2000.

"Inline is a lot different than ice hockey," Saur said. "It's really fast-paced. You never stop moving. It's tiring. It's hot. It's good exercise. And it gives you a reason to come have a good time with the boys, and then go out for a beer after the game."

About the league

What: Syracuse Inline Hockey Association Season: League play runs from the second week in May through the second week in August

Where: Sunnycrest Ice Rink regularly and Meachem Ice Rink for three weeks in July

When: Game start times are between 6:15 and 9:15 p.m. Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. For a complete schedule see www.syracuseinlinehockey.com. Spectators are welcome.

Catch a glimpse: Games with comedic commentary air from 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays on Time Warner Cable's public-access Channel 98.

So you want to play? You missed the deadline for this season, but if you want to sign up as an alternate or replacement player, e-mail Favalo at patfavalo@syracuseinlinehockey.com. For next season, sign up as a team or individual by May 1.

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