



## BIRMINGHAM UNIFIED HOCKEY

### TENTH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

The 2001 - 2002 hockey season marks the Tenth anniversary of the Birmingham Unified Hockey Team and it seems appropriate to recount how it all began.

In the spring of 1991 a group of Brinningham parents, led by Del Schroeder, began a dialogue with the BPS administration and the Athletic Council. The parent group included Carol Moore, Tom Freisen, Rick Kammer, Rick Williams, John Bennish, Jim Brenner and myself.

During a period of approximately 10 years prior to 1991 there had been two other separate parent groups who had attempted to get school approval for a high school hockey team and each had failed.

It appeared that this effort would fail also, because during a period between the summer of 1991 and spring 1992 the Athletic Council voted against a high school hockey team in three separate votes and the school board said they would not even consider an application unless the Athletic Council gave it's approval first. However, Del Schroeder would not give up! He was like a determined Bulldog and the rest of us, although we felt hopeless, wouldn't let Del go on alone. With nothing to lose, we began by going directly to each school board member separately, then seeking out support of individuals who had influence with school board members and finally by getting an appointment with the Superintendent of Schools.

During this appointment our presentation included a stack of petitions with over 1200 signatures of Birmingham students, adults, teachers and coaches who supported high school hockey. A Seaholm student by the name of Mike Lyons was very instrumental in securing the bulk of signatures on the petitions. He put together a group of students at both Groves and Seaholm who then spread and solicited the petitions through out the schools. A gratifying moment for our parent group was when Mike tried out and made that first high school team as a Senior.

In July 1992, we received word back that the school board would approve a high school team at their next meeting in August but, with certain stipulations. One of which was that a contract would have to be signed between BPS and the High School Hockey Parents Association. Rick Williams and the BPA attorneys negotiated the contract and it was signed on October 22, 1992. that contract still exists today. Under this agreement, if the hockey parents association fails to meet and of the conditions set forth in the agreement, the BPS can desanction high school hockey.

Obviously you cannot begin a high school hockey team in late October 1992 and hope to play in the 1992-93 season! Del Schroeder was thinking ahead! In the summer of 1991 he put together a team of 8th grade Birmingham students and played a Bantam AA schedule for the 1991-92 season to get prepared for the start of a 1992-93 high school season.

He called this team the Birmingham Eagles and from this team 8 players then played as Freshmen on the 1992-93 high school team. Of those 8, only 4 stayed with the high school team for all 4 years.

In addition to playing this Bantam team, Del talked the coaches of the Suburban High School Hockey League (The OAA didn't exist at the time) into holding games open for Birmingham for the 1992-93 season and somehow he secured enough ice at DSC to have practice and home games for the 1992-93 season. We moved to Cranbrook the following season. It had been a long struggle and then it had to come together very quickly.



The problem of trying to blend Groves and Seaholm colors (they don't compliment each other) was solved by going to neutral Red/White/Blue team colors. The first year team players were allowed to name the team, they picked "Unified". Their choice proved to be quite popular. The Birmingham hockey team was the first high school athletic team in Michigan to use the name Unified. There are now 28 high school hockey teams in Michigan which are combined with two or more schools and they are all called Unified.

The BPS determined that the hockey team would come under the direction of Groves School and Bill Rankin was the Groves A.D. until he retired in 1997. Bill was in favor of hockey, he wanted to see the program become successful and he guided the parents in procedures that would satisfy school and state requirements and insure good organization in the hockey program. All of his guidelines are still in place and Bill continues to work to help this hockey team.

The year after Birmingham Unified played it's first season, our parents group and the school administration began receiving phone calls from parents and school administrations of other high schools from all over south western Michigan asking if we would supply information and advice on how Birmingham was able to get a high school hockey team and how to organize it. There were 75 high school hockey teams in Michigan in 1992, today there are 147. Most of the new ones are in S. E. Michigan. Of all of the OAA hockey teams that exist today, only Southfield existed in 1992 and now Southfield is gone.

Del Schroeder became Co-Head coach with Bill Reepmeyer from 1992 to 1995. He still contributes financially to the hockey program and comes to a fair amount of games. There is a Unified player award given annually that honors Del's contributions to this hockey program. Carol Moore served as the parent association Treasurer and put out the Yearly Program until 1996 when her son graduated. Carol and her husband Jerry still contribute financially.

Tom Freisen was the first president of the parents association, he resigned in late 1992. Rick Kammer was active with the team for 3 years. Rick Williams negotiated the agreement with Cranbrook to move there in fall 1993 and he left the team later that year. John Bennish and Jim Brenner were active with the team until 1995. Bill Reepmeyer has been Head Coach since the beginning and provides significant financial support yearly. His tenure as a high school hockey coach is among the longest in the state and his relationship with other coaches adds to the respect others have for the Birmingham Program.

I may have made it sound simple and easy in getting this hockey program started but, it wasn't!! Those of us still around know how difficult it was and we feel satisfaction for the opportunity and enjoyment that has been offered to all of the students and parents who have taken part in this program during the past ten years. It's now up to those who come behind us to see that it continues as it has for these past ten years.

And, oh yes, I'm still around. I have two sons who played for this team and I served as president of the hockey parents association from 1992 until 1998 when my youngest son graduated. I then turned everything over to the existing parents but, was asked to come back and help out.

Bruce Egerer

