

Playing like girls...on the elite boys hockey team!

By Shari Hittesdorf

It's not unusual for girls to play hockey. Over the past 15 years, female players and teams have grown by leaps and bounds.

So what makes this story unique?

Well, for starters we have four seventh grade girls from Sleepy Eye who have always played hockey on the same team, from mini mites on up. And for most of those years, the quartet played on boys' teams.

Now here's the kicker, last year New Ulm and Sleepy Eye Hockey merged, giving the four girls, for the first time in their careers, the opportunity to play the sport they so love, with their own gender.

Karlie Ries, Dani Weiss, Lauren Klein and Ali Beltz were member of the NUSE 12U girls' squad during the 2011-2012 season. And although they enjoyed their experience, each figured out quickly it just wasn't the same after battling against boys for all those years. All four decided they needed to make a return to the boys' game.

"The boys' game is much faster," explained Ali.

"More competitive," added Lauren.

So, when tryouts came last fall, the foursome showed their stuff during pee wee practices. And when the local rosters were set, all four again ended up on the same team. Drum roll please...Karlie, Lauren, Dani and Ali earned a spot on the Pee Wee A team, which is the elite squad of all the local 11 and 12 year olds (age before 7/1/2012) (NUSE also has a PeeWee B and a Pee Wee C team)

"We were all were excited," they all answered at one time. One admitted to screaming, another did a dance. And of course there was a lot of texting back and forth going on.

This year is a bit different from their previous years of playing on boys' teams. The girls now have to dress in separate locker rooms for home games and practices.

And on the road they are forced to use the public restroom.

"We just change our undergarments in the bathroom," giggled Ali. "Undergarments, that's what the coaches call them."

The foursome agreed playing on the Pee Wee A team is definitely challenging. They all said they are forced to work harder and play more as a team.

"It's also more aggressive," said Dani, the smallest member on the entire team. She however didn't seem one bit intimidated and even bragged about getting the first penalty of the season.

Karlie, a goalie, especially enjoys the test Pee Wees bring.

"I get to face harder shots," she said.

Bill Ries (Karlie's dad and one of the team's coaches said having the girls on the team really didn't take any adjustment for him and his co-coach Terry Heiderscheidt.

"We were used to it; we've always had girls mixed with the boys in Sleepy Eye."



Front row: Dani Weiss and Ali Beltz. Back row: Lauren Klein and Karlie

"For some of the boys, however, it was a process of the girls proving they belonged," continued Bill.

If you have been to a Pee Wee A game this season, it's obvious the girls fit right in with their teammates. As a matter of fact, take away the pony tails and you would never even know they were females. That's how good they are.

The girls did admit, after playing one season on a girls' team, there is a difference between the two genders.

"There is less drama (with boys)," they all said.

"Boys get mad at themselves but they get over it and go play better," explained Karlie. "It sticks with girls."

"And boys get more penalties", said Lauren.

"Boys like to retaliate," chimed in Ali.

As for what the boys might be seeing that is different from what they are accustomed to?

"Lots of giggling," Lauren blurted out.

And flirting?

"No, that would be weird because they are our teammates," said Dani as she was shaking her head.

It's obvious the girls are all great friends. And based on the success of the team, they really do fit right in. The Pee Wee A squad is 14-5 on the season with most of their losses coming during tournament play where they face off against some of the best teams at their age level in the state.

This season might be the last chance these four girls have to play together on a "boys" team. Next year, three of the girls will

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be competing for varsity spots on the New Ulm Sleepy Eye Girls Hockey team. Karlie is hoping to compete with the boys one more time, perfecting her goaltending skills at the Bantam level.

No doubt this story will be continued in a few years, perhaps when all four finish off their careers bragging multiple state tournament appearances.



The foursome took to the ice as teammate for the first time as Mini Mites. (Ali- front row, third from right; Dani- front row second from right; Karlie- second row second from right; Lauren- second row sixth from left)

The girls fit right in on the Pee Wee A squad this season. (Ali- front row third from right; Dani- front row second from right; Karlie- front row first from right; Lauren- back row third from right)



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KARLIE RIES #1

Goaltender

Favorite Pro Player: Henrik Lundqvist
Rangers



LAUREN KLEIN #2

Wing

Favorite Pro Player: Sidney Crosby Penguins



ALI BELTZ #14

Wing

Favorite Pro Player: Patrick Kane Blackhawks



DANI WEISS #12

Wing

Favorite Pro Player: Mikko Kouvu Wild