

Tournament celebrating 40th year

BY MIKE FRASER

The Wheat City will welcome 64 minor hockey teams over two separate weeks this month as the 40th edition of the Victoria Inn/Maple Leaf Tournament of Champions hits the ice at all four Brandon arenas this week.

Atom A, Pee wee A and AA, and Bantam Female action takes centre stage in Week 1 of the annual minor hockey extravaganza, which gets underway Thursday and runs through Sunday. The second week typically runs the following weekend, but with the Safeway Championship provincial men's curling tournament scheduled for the Wheat City Feb. 13-17, the second week will go in a little more than two weeks time — Feb. 21-24 — featuring A and AA levels in the Bantam and Midget age groups.

"It's ready to go for another year," said tournament chair Darryl Wolski, who has run the annual event for the Brandon Youth Hockey Association for the last seven years. "We just try to keep this thing running properly and keep it running in this city."

Officials from the BYHA, Victoria Inn, Royal Oak Inn and Suites and PROactive Sports and Concert Group were on hand during a news conference at the Victoria Inn Monday to announce the hotel's major commitment to the tournament for another five years.

Wolski said support like that helps keep the tournament alive.

"What all our sponsors contribute every year, without them it's over," he said.



Darryl Wolski



Brent Miller



Glen Parker

Local sponsors step up for five more years

Local businesses have stepped up to ensure the Victoria Inn/Maple Leaf Tournament of Champions will continue through to 2013.

Tournament chairman Darryl Wolski announced Monday that the Victoria Inn and Genesis Hospitality have signed on for another five years of sponsorship with a \$25,000 total commitment. Wolski added that Maple Leaf also provides close to \$3,000 worth of sponsorship help each year for the annual hockey championship.

"Obviously our payback comes with the business we have," said Brent Miller, general manager of the Victoria Inn. "Without it, we may have to search for something else, so it's a natural fit for us ... And any time we can give

Nearly 10 years since the tournament was taken over by the BYHA from the City of Brandon, the Tournament of Champions continues to have little trouble filling up the local rinks with teams. In fact, Wolski said, many teams have to be turned away

"When you have to come down to the selection process, it's almost like you're a hockey coach when you have to cut players," he said. "We get some new teams every year, and there are some teams we give a bit of leverage because they've been with the

back to the kids and give them an opportunity to play in it (is a good thing) ... It is a great championship for them to be involved in."

The tournament was on the verge of leaving the Wheat City five years ago before new sponsors stepped up, according to Brandon Youth Hockey Associated president Glen Parker, whose organization oversees the tournament.

"There was a very real chance that the tournament wouldn't be here right now had these folks not stepped up five years ago," Parker said. "So we've been able to make it continue to survive. I wouldn't say we're thriving, but we are surviving and if we can do that, we look forward to keeping it here for kids for many years to come."

» Brandon Sun

tournament for six or seven years and they haven't given us any problems whatsoever."

While the tournament once had more of an international flavour, this year's event still features two teams from California — in Midget A and

Midget AA — as well as a strong mix of clubs from the Prairies and northwestern Ontario.

The tournament also attracts plenty of scouts from the Western Hockey League and Junior A leagues.

"We might see about five guys for the Pee wee age group," Wolski said. "But come the second week with Bantam A and AA, we'll probably see upwards of 30 or 40 (scouts) throughout the weekend."

BYHA president Glen Parker said the Tournament of Champions also brings a strong positive economic impact to the Wheat City.

"There's not too many events that bring 1,300 players and about 3,000 adult visitors for that period of time each year," Parker said. "It's a pretty significant event for the city."

Parker also admitted, however, that support for the tournament must continue and more help may soon be needed to ensure a safe future for the annual event.

"We have no immediate plans to stop running it," he said. "We think it has a value to the community itself and it's a good experience for the kids. The business community has been outstanding and we need that support ... We can't expect (Wolski) to run the tournament for nothing because it is very time-consuming. But as long as it continues to be somewhat viable, we'll do what we can to keep it here. But we can always use help."

"We may have to talk to the city and see if there's any other things we can look at."

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Conner Cochrane chases Vincent Massey's Adam Chambers (left) Monday. (Colin Corneau/Brandon Sun)

Cusitar clips Vikings

Cole Cusitar took care of the Vincent Massey Vikings with two goals in less than three minutes Monday night.

Cusitar scored twice in a span of 2:46 — including the game-winner with 5:31 remaining in the third period — to lead the Russell Major Pratt Trojans to a 3-1 victory over the Vikings in Westman High School Hockey League action at Westman Place.

Carter McLeod added an empty-net goal with 12 seconds remaining to seal the deal for the Trojans, who trailed 1-0 entering the third period.

Andrew Johnston's unassisted goal at 8:17 of the second period had given the Vikings the lead.

James Brydon earned the victory, while Shawn Richardson took the loss for the Vikings, who took six of 13 minors and a misconduct.

Local Roundup

VIGIER STAMPS OUT KINGS

SWAN RIVER — The Dauphin Kings couldn't contain Stephan Vigier of Notre Dame de Lourdes on Monday night.

Vigier opened and closed the scoring with his 29th and 30th goals of the season and assisted on Dustin Kimber's game-winner to lead the Swan Valley Stampeders to a 4-1 victory over the Kings in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League.

Jeremy Laviolette also scored for the Stamps, while Tommy Thomas replied for the Kings, assisted by Torey Haggarty of Hamiota.

Chris Ward made 48 saves for Swan Valley (22-24-4-3) as Dauphin slipped to 28-21-2-0.

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Clark back on track

BY JAMES SHEWAGA

Centre Andrew Clark is back on the ice, but the Brandon Wheat Kings could still be short-handed on the back end when they return to Western Hockey League action on Wednesday night.

Clark, a 19-year-old Brandon native, practised with his teammates for the first time Monday since suffering a broken ankle back on Dec. 15, but it's unclear if he will return to the lineup when Brandon battles the Medicine Hat Tigers tomorrow night at Westman Place (7 p.m. start).

On the blueline, the Wheat Kings added Keith Aulie to their injured list in Saturday's 5-1 loss to the Moose Jaw Warriors, joining veteran defencemen Chad Erb (shoulder) and Theran Yeo (ankle). While Aulie's status is undetermined, Yeo and Erb have been listed as day-to-day since last week and have already missed two games apiece.

However, Brandon will get back trade-deadline acquisition Matt McCue tomorrow night after the 19-year-old defenceman served a two-game suspension for checking from behind.

The Wheat Kings (31-19-0-2) face the Tigers (29-18-5-1) Wednesday at Westman Place in a battle of two teams tied for seventh overall in the WHL's Eastern Conference.

Brandon native Ryan White is the WHL's player of the week.

The 19-year-old centre with the Calgary Hitmen fired five goals and set up five others for



Andrew Clark: Practises



Ryan White: player of week

10 points and an impressive +9 plus/minus rating while helping the Hitmen go a perfect 4-0 last week. White now has 25 goals and a team-leading 59 points in 52 games, along with 83 penalty minutes and a gaudy +23 plus/minus rating for the league-leading Hitmen (39-13-1-3). White had a goal and two assists to help the Hitmen officially clinch a playoff spot with a 4-1 victory over the Medicine Hat Tigers on Saturday night.

White, a graduate of the Brandon Midget AAA Wheat Kings, was selected in the fourth round (69th overall) by the Hitmen in the 2003 WHL Bantam Draft and was also picked in the third round (66th overall) by the Montreal Canadiens in the 2006 NHL Entry Draft.

Former Wheat Kings snipers Eric Fehr and Ryan Stone are back in the NHL.

Fehr, who has missed much of this season with back problems, was recalled by the

Washington Capitals on Monday after scoring two goals and notching six points in 10 AHL games with the Hershey Bears. Meanwhile, Stone, who was called up for his NHL debut last month, was recalled by the Pittsburgh Penguins yesterday after scoring seven goals and picking up 21 points and 74 penalty minutes in 38 games this season with the AHL's Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins.

The Regina Pats and Saskatoon Blades have been fined \$1,500 apiece for engaging in another line brawl on Friday night, the fifth multiple fight situation for both teams already this season.

Pats head coach Curtis Hunt and Blades head coach/general manager Lorne Molleken both sat out their club's Saturday night games after being suspended for two games apiece by the league, which also asked the Pats to beef up security behind the visitor's bench.

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Super ratings for game

NEW YORK — The New York Giants' thrilling 17-14 win over New England was the most-watched Super Bowl ever in Canada and the U.S.

A combined audience of 5.07 million Canadian viewers watched the game on CTV and RDS, surpassing the previous record of 4.98 million who watched in 2006. It was CTV's first-ever broadcast of the NFL classic. Meanwhile, 97.5 million viewers in the U.S. tuned in, a total that is second

only to the "MASH" finale audience, Nielsen Media Research said Monday.

The game eclipsed the previous Super Bowl record of 94.08 million, set when Dallas defeated Pittsburgh in 1996.

The game was also the most-watched show of the year in Canada, with an average of 4.16 million viewers.

Fox charged US\$2.7 million for 30 seconds of advertising time on the game.

» The Associated Press

TODAY: IN THE CITY

• **HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL** — Neelin is at Crocus Plains. Varsity Girls: 6 p.m. Varsity Boys: 7:45 p.m.

IN WESTMAN

• **MJHL HOCKEY** — Waywayseecappo Wolverines at Neepawa Natives, 7:30 p.m.

ON TELEVISION

• **NHL HOCKEY** — Wayne Gretzky's Phoenix Coyotes travel to Calgary to

clash with the Flames, 8 p.m. (Sportsnet).

• **NBA BASKETBALL** — Boston Celtics at the Cleveland Cavaliers, 6 p.m. (The Score).

IN LOCAL HISTORY

• **20 YEARS AGO** — Tricia Watson scored 21 points to lead the Earl Oxford Trojans to a 71-11 win over the Riverheights Royals in a junior high girls basketball game. Nancy Peleshok added 10 points for the Trojans.

• **30 YEARS AGO** — Cal

Fairbairn scored an overtime goal to give A & W a 4-3 victory over Neepawa in the Labatt's Award broomball tournament. Bill Mayberry fired a pair of goals for the winners and Al Pitzel managed the other.

• **40 YEARS AGO** — Doug Elliott of the Brandon Curling Club and his rink of Archie Grant, Alf Poole and Walter Lowe defeated Stan Henry of Oak River to win Zone 5 in senior men's curling at the Brandon Club.

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WHL NOTEBOOK

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Returns next week