

The Mighty Eagles



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The Eastern club hockey team may have had a rocky start but their intensity and dedication has paid off. Their minds have never strayed from the true meaning of the game and they have played with heart and found something truly inspiring. In every scrape of the blade and in every slap of the puck, in every grueling practice and in every victory, their pride and talent shines through.

Dr. Brian Levin-Stankevich, vice president for Student Affairs, had a dream of starting a club hockey team at Eastern, a dream that became reality in spring 1999. But his vision of a glorious team that would compete with the best in the West was initially shattered when only nine players came to the first practice. They managed not a single win in their first 10 games.

"I wasn't out here to win. I just wanted to play hockey," says Dan Coombs, a student and player from Wasilla, Alaska, who has been playing on the team since its inception. "We were trying to boost interest in the team and have fun. I think we accomplished that."



The team's enthusiasm and dedication paid off with a season finish of 6-12, an excellent motivation for the following year, when they ended the season ranked 10th out of 34 teams in the West League.

"It just takes time to get things started,"

says Levin-Stankevich.

"We have lots of talent on the rink, some even good enough for Division I. But we are still a relatively new team and look forward to more improvements."

Amongst that talent is Candace Denigan, the only woman on the team of 22 players.

Before coming to Eastern, she was a women's Division I hockey player at Minnesota State.

"I love playing on the team," she says.

"They treat me like one of the guys. We can't go anywhere but up, and I am proud to be a part of such an exciting climb!"

And the climb has been an exhilarating one. About half way through the current season, they have a record of 6-10-1. A notable accomplishment considering their game schedule includes all top 10 teams in the West League, some of them national competitors.

In his first year as head coach, Dan Ryan feels adamant about the current success and the future of the team.

"Eventually I want the team to challenge for the National Championship," says Ryan. "I am here to make something of this hockey team."

As a project manager at PBI Construction, Ryan gets lots of support for the team through the company's owner, Jon Hawley (1991



alumnus). He has recently given the team funding to build a team locker room at Planet Ice, their home ice rink.

Levin-Stankevich says the team has many goals for the future. They hope to bring in more fans, and make Eastern hockey one of the most popular sports in the Spokane area. They would also like to build their roster to eventually field a travel team and a local B team. Other plans in the future include a team bus and a local ice rink.

The team's future looks promising, with six freshmen this year, creating a solid return for the following seasons. Players from California, Montana and many local Junior B players have already committed for next season.

Levin-Stankevich is extremely optimistic about the future of the team. "We are already known throughout the West League as one of the most stable and upcoming hockey teams in Washington state, so the possibilities in our future are exciting."