

# SPORTS

## RAP



## OFFSIDER

Another big hockey story from the summer was Tampa Bay Lightning GM Phil Esposito's invitation for female goaltender Manon Rheame to attend his team's first ever training camp. To the pleasure of the media and various women's groups, Rheame attended the camp and played a period of an exhibition game, becoming the first female to play NHL hockey.

That is the good part. The bad part is perhaps Esposito's motives. Rheame's invitation can be defended both ways. Some people speculate that Esposito did it for the publicity, using Rheame to attract both people and media attention to the team.

It does sound like a great way to initiate a team into the NHL -- using a female goaltender -- but expansion teams do not have large bases from which to draw and cannot be picky about the talent with which to experiment. Rheame is, although an excellent female hockey player, not exactly suited to the "big leagues".

The whole Rheame episode raised the issue of women in the NHL. Can women play NHL hockey? Not yet. The game is now faster and harder than it once was. "Small" players like Calgary's Theoren Fleury (and 5'6" is not normally considered small) suffer hits from guys up to a foot taller. Goaltending may be realistically the only position a woman can play in the NHL; a netminder is both the most protected and most targeted player on the ice.

Rheame's appearance in the exhibition game illustrates that the NHL is ready for women; but women are not yet ready for the NHL.

Women certainly are becoming more prolific within the hockey world. First, Canada's women's team won the world championships. Then the New Jersey Devils hired long-time hockey writer Sherry Ross as their radio color commentator. Over the summer the Montreal Canadiens hired a woman as one of their scouts. Most recently Rheame played a period of an exhibition game and signed with an ECHL team. The trend is speeding up.

The Panthers played two games in Nova Scotia last weekend, as it stands right now, they have not won a game. Be patient -- all of this readjustment will eventually lead to a better team. Billy MacMillan has solved his goaltending problems by naming Scott Blanchard an assistant coach; goaltending duties will be shared by Jamie Blanchard and rookie Kevin MacDougall.

The Panthers play at home this Saturday night against St. Mary's University. If you go to the game, watch their first unit in the power play. MacMillan's use of five not-exactly-defensive forwards may be suited to an offensive attack; but most other teams have skaters fast enough to get by all five Panthers and create a short-handed threat.

Join us at the Civic Center Saturday night; we'll try to cheer the Panthers to their first victory of the season. ■

## Wendel Column

by Chris

Wendel updates. Wendel has been injured (groin) since October 24. He is improving day to day and should be back ASAP. I didn't see the latest game but the Red Wings thrashed Toronto 7-1 on the 29th. That kind of score is pathetic. Obviously Wendel was needed to stir up the pot.

Wendel looks a lot different without the mustache yet somehow even meaner. Wendel was up to his old tricks in the win over Chicago recently, and every Black Hawk on the ice was looking to kill Wendel after he roughed up a number of Hawks.

All hockey fans shouldn't be without Hockey Scouting Report by Frank Bow and Sherry Ross. This book gives the low down on the over 420 of the best players in the NHL. The writing style is funny and colorful unlike, say, The Sporting News. Here is an excerpt on Wendel: "Clark has a positively wicked snap shot that will go through a goalie's glove, thru the net, thru the boards, and out into Carlton Street... He is a bull in a china shop... He is all muscle, all mean, you want hard hockey, watch Wendel Clark..." For those who hate the Habs here is their description of ex-Hab, Shayne (Dog House) Corson, "Corson does not come to play every game and as a result there are too many nights when he seems happy being a perimeter player."

As a parting note, remember to never be ashamed to wear your team's hat. Wear it thru thick and thin. Anyone who cannot do this ought to get their butt kicked.