

THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS
Special Olympics floor hockey
Don't sell these guys short

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May 21, 2003

To the outsider, Special Olympics sports may be perceived as something relatively tame -- preaching fun at the expense of intensity.

Those who witnessed the recent Second Annual Mississauga Invitational Floor Hockey Tournament at Erindale Secondary School, however, were in for a surprise.

Sure, there were smiles, celebratory high-fives and supportive fans, but they were met with an equal number of grunts, bodychecks (supposedly illegal) and emotional spectators questioning the eyesight of certain referees.

Doubling in size from last year's inaugural event, the tournament featured 305 players on 18 teams from throughout Ontario in two separate competitive levels.

In the higher C-level, Mississauga's representative, the Lightning, finished third in its 12-team loop. After opening the day with two wins, 11-2 over Essex and 2-1 over Toronto, Lightning dropped a 5-3 score to Cambridge, placing them in the consolation final against Newmarket.

After Lightning opened the scoring on a goal by centre Arthur Rea, Newmarket evened the score. Defenceman Brian Lindsay gave Lightning another lead, but it wasn't until right-winger Russell Slaney scored the third goal that Lightning pulled away for good. Defenceman Ryan Azzopardi buried an empty-netter to complete the scoring, in a 4-2 victory.

"Our defence today was fabulous," said Azzopardi, who scored three goals on the day. "It was the difference."

Having lost to Newmarket in a tournament at Fort York earlier in the season, Lightning is hoping to strike gold later in the season, including the provincials in Ottawa in May.

"Right now we're on a high," said Logan. "Our guys have a high confidence level right now and they're playing very hard."

In the C-level final, London topped Scarborough 3-2. Meanwhile, York beat Saugeen to win the D-Level's top prize.

With interest in the tournament growing, Logan said he would like to keep the size down before expanding, in order to run a smooth operation.

"I think this is a good number," he said. "If we are to get bigger we'll have to expand to two days."

Over 40 volunteers from the Lightning participated while the tournament's sponsor, Scotiabank, provided 11 volunteers of their own.



Staff photo by Chris Horobin

Mark Ellis (9) of the Mississauga Lightning is dogged by a member of the Toronto Maple Leafs during the recent Second Annual Mississauga Invitational Special Olympics Floor Hockey Tournament at Erindale Secondary School. The Lightning won the game 2-1.