

# Gulf Coast Ms. Conduct women's hockey team prepares for 14th season

BY DAVID WILSON

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Corinne Deckard's career in hockey hasn't just followed the path of the sport's growth in Florida. It's specifically followed its increasing presence with women.

When Deckard got her first job at an ice rink in Palm Beach Gardens during her junior year of high school, the rink didn't offer hockey for women. For Deckard to actually begin playing hockey she had to travel to Sunrise during her senior year.

At the University of Florida, women's hockey was still only a small niche. The women's club team she played for only lasted a handful of seasons. After its dissolution, Deckard had to wait until she moved to Palmetto for work after college to start playing again.

Thirteen years ago, Deckard helped found the Gulf Coast Ms. Conduct, a team in the Florida Women's Hockey League (FWHL) drawing players from as far north as Brandon and as far south as Port Charlotte. The FWHL was only a handful of teams at the time, and rosters were tough to fill out. Deckard had to travel to a jamboree in Fort Myers just to put together a complete roster and get some help from an already established team in Brandon.

"We got a couple players from there to fill out the team because we didn't have enough," Deckard said. "We kind of decided to join forces."

Her approach was just to find athletes. She didn't need players with hockey experience as long as they understood their bodies and were willing to be coached. For 13 years, the Ms. Conduct has been a steadily growing presence at Ellenton Ice and Sports, and next month the club will begin its 14th season in the FWHL. The FWHL season began for recreational clubs — which Ms. Conduct is not fielding this season — last weekend in Fort Myers. Ms. Conduct's first tournament will be Oct. 21-23 in Lake Worth.

The adult hockey league is open to women 18 and older, and the Ms. Conduct's roster ranges mostly from ages 23-40, with a few older outliers. There is a bit of overturn, Deckard said, but the club has had a solid core of five or six players for most of the team's tenure.

And Deckard's team can take at least a little bit of credit for the sport's uptick in popularity. Practices are always open to girls 10 and older, and one constant participant of the practices 13 years ago is now playing for the Ms. Conduct.

"You're getting more and more women who have played at a higher level moving and making Florida home," Deckard said. "When we started it was really hard to find girls who played club or Division III hockey."

## **I Heart Softball Fall Kickoff**

Two teams from Manatee County and one from Sarasota combined to win three of the four championships at the I Heart Softball Fall Kickoff this weekend at Lakewood Ranch Park, and a fourth team missed out on sweeping the tournament for the 941 area code by one run in the United States Specialty Sports Association softball tournament Sunday.

Bradenton's Suncoast Storm put together the best weekend of any individual club, winning the 11 open division and falling one run shy of a second championship in 13 open. Suncoast Storm '06 snuck past Valrico's 05 Florida Fire, 8-7, to win the 11 open championship, while Suncoast Storm '04 fell in the 13 open championship to Tampa's NLS 12U Elite-Bergen, 4-3.

**Batbusters:** Morgan 16U gave Bradenton a second championship with a 7-1 blowout of Seffner's Tampa Lady Hawks in the high school open division.

**Florida Select:** Merrill rounded out the field with a win in 15 open. The Sarasota team shut out Team Tampa 02, 10-0, in the final division.

## **Pop Warner**

The Palmetto Trojans were the only Pop Warner Little Scholars football program with a winning weekend Saturday with a pair of wins against the South Shore Jr. Longhorns at East Bay High School in Gibsonton. The Trojans opened the day with

an 18-7 win against the Jr. Longhorns then scored another low-scoring, 7-2 win against the Longhorns in junior pee wee. Palmetto's only loss came in the pee wee division with a 34-0 loss to South Shore.

The East Manatee Bulldogs were split between two locations. The Bulldogs began the day with a 13-13 tie against the Dade City Wildcats at Mickens Field in mighty mites, then lost 26-13 in junior pee wee. East Manatee's day in Dade City ended with a 34-0 win. At Freedom High School in Tampa, the junior varsity Bulldogs blew out the New Tampa Tigers, 47-0.

The Manatee Mustangs and Manatee Wildcats each put together 2-2 weekends. The Mustangs won mighty mites and junior varsity games against the Fishhawk Wolfpack at Fishhawk Sports Complex, but dropped junior pee wee and pee wee games in Fishhawk. The Manatee Wildcats won mighty mites and junior pee wee games against the Silver Raiders at G.T. Bray Park Recreation Center, but lost pee wee and junior varsity games in Bradenton.

The North Manatee Storm were the only Manatee County team with a sub-.500 weekend. After opening the weekend with a mighty mites win against the Tampa PAL Jr. Buccaneers at Buffalo Creek Park, the Storm fell to the Jr. Buccaneers in junior pee wee and junior varsity in Palmetto.

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