



Submitted photo by Edwin Ulrich

The Miles Macdonell Buckeyes celebrate after their 4-1 victory over the Dakota Lancers to clinch the WWSHL championship.

Buckeye girls finally claim hockey title

East Kildonan

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Seven years after launching a women's hockey program, the Miles Macdonell Buckeyes captured their first championship last week.

The Buckeyes swept the Dakota Lancers in the best-of-three championship series of the Winnipeg Women's High School Hockey League's second division with a 3-2 overtime win in Game 1 and a decisive 4-1 victory in the clinching second game.

Buckeyes captain Morgan Prendergast, a Grade 12 student, said the victory was extra sweet considering her competitive hockey career is probably over.

"It was really exciting," said the 18-year-old East Kildonan resident.

"It was a good way to end the high school season and to be done with hockey."

Prendergast and eight other Buckeyes nearly won a pair of championships this season, as their Bronx Park midget A-1

team lost in the Winnipeg Minor Hockey Association final to Varsity View.

While the double dose of titles certainly would have been welcome, Prendergast said if she had to pick only one it would have been an easy choice.

"I would prefer for sure to win the high school league," she said.

"It's a bigger deal when you're wearing school colours, and I feel like the high school team deserved it more almost."

Miles Mac vice-principal Dean Finlay, who coached the Buckeyes along with three parent volunteers, said it helped to have a core group of players who happened to be playing and practising together constantly as part of a community centre team.

"I think it's huge," Finlay said. "We never had to worry about conditioning. The girls played a lot of hockey, so in practices we could focus on the fundamentals we wanted them to do."

"That core was getting really solid coaching with the other team as well, which helped in the long run. The chemistry that a coach looks for was already there."

Knowing that nine players would be

graduating after this season, the Buckeyes went with a large roster of 19 players.

Finlay said the goal was to give as much experience as possible to the Grade 10 players so that the program wouldn't fall off too steeply next season. The experience was completely new for four of the Grade 10 players, who were ringette players grabbing hockey sticks for the very first time.

"They all had lots of skating skill from ringette, which was great," Finlay said. "It's not a simple transition, but they bring an innate ability to skate. They got to a lot of pucks that other players might not have. It's just a matter of developing skill now."

Prendergast admitted she wasn't sure how the ringette players would fare with the frozen biscuit, but her concerns were quickly erased.

"They improved a lot," she said. "At the beginning of the season I was a little bit iffy about them, but now they're all really strong players. I think they might do really well next year."

In the first division championship series, Oak Park swept St. Mary's in two games to successfully defend their championship.