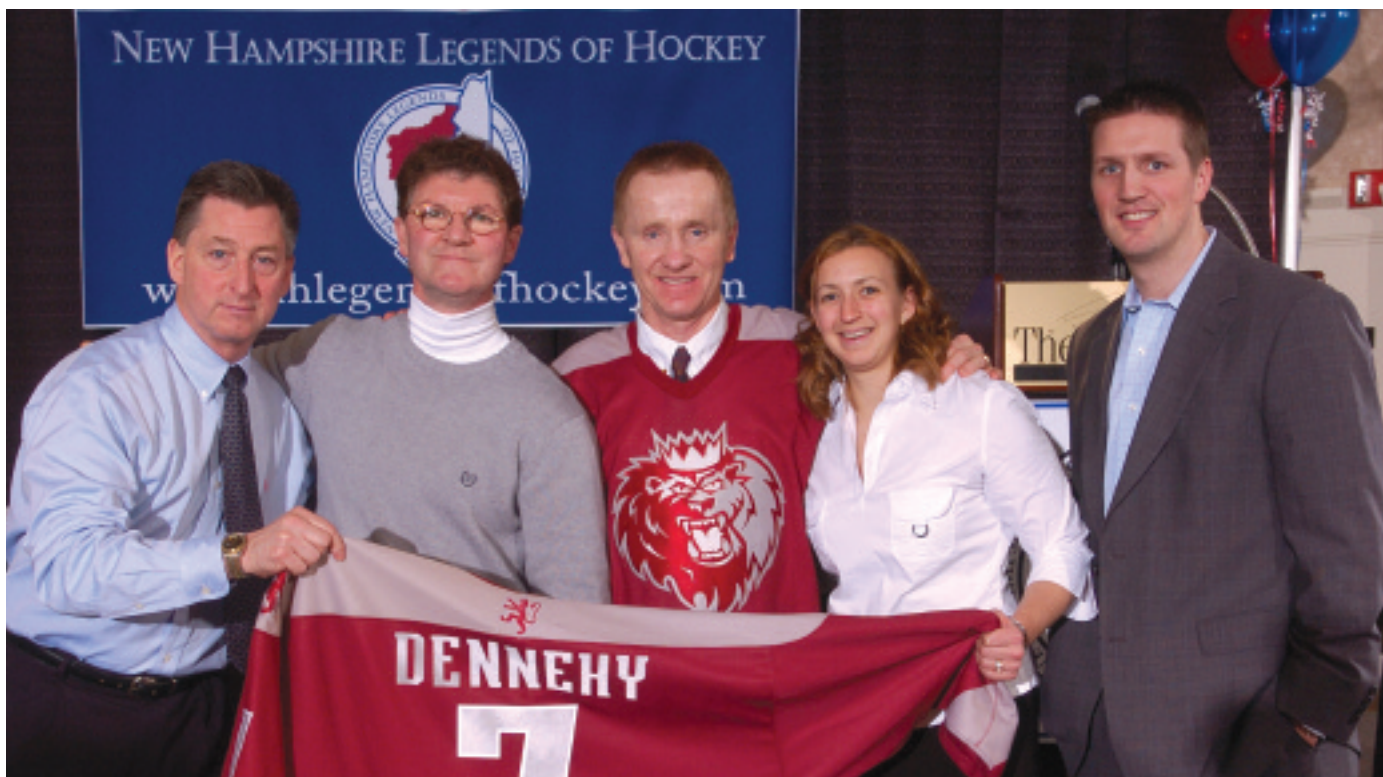


# A Hall of Fame Hockey Program | By Mike Catano



NH LEGENDS OF HOCKEY

*On hand for Exeter's induction into the NH Legends of Hockey Hall of Fame were (from left) Boys Assistant Coach Mark Evans, Rink Manager Dan Connors, Boys Head Coach Dana Barbin, Girls Head Coach Melissa Pacific and Russell Bartlett '97, PEA's all-time leading scorer. Until the opening in 1970 of Love Gym with its two indoor rinks (opposite page, bottom), ice hockey was an outdoor sport. In 1923, Exeter constructed three adjoining rinks (top) on what's now the tennis courts.*

This was a good year for Exeter ice hockey. Both the boys and girls varsity teams had winning seasons, and the boys team made it to the quarterfinals of the New England Prep School Ice Hockey Association (NEPSIHA) playoffs. Goalie Ryan Purdy '08 broke all PEA goalie records this year and was named to NEPSIHA's Division I all-star team.

Yet there's another reason this has been a significant year: At season's end, PEA was inducted into the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey Hall of Fame, in recognition of close to a century's worth of outstanding Exeter ice hockey teams, players and coaches. The ceremony took place on March 2 as part of an AHL match-up between the Manchester Monarchs and the Springfield Falcons. Varsity coaches Dana Barbin and Melissa Pacific were on hand for the induction, as was one of Exeter's all-time leading scorers, Russell Bartlett '97, who holds the boys scoring record with 275 points.

Ice hockey has a long and storied history at Exeter, filled with exceptional athletes and coaches, both male and female. The early years were marked by the struggle to sustain play on natural ice despite the vagaries of winter weather. In 1954, Exeter got its first artificial ice when a permanent outdoor rink was built behind the boiler plant. In 1970, Exeter hockey moved indoors and into the modern era with the opening of Love Gymnasium, which boasts two ice arenas.

## EARLY DAYS

According to Laurence Crosbie, author of *The Phillips Exeter Academy: A History*, it was students who first introduced ice hockey at Exeter. In 1911, senior "Tug" Tyler, a day student from Exeter, organized an informal hockey team, acting as coach and captain. Later, Tyler became a hockey captain at Dartmouth College. In 1913, the Senior Council launched Exeter's first ice hockey team.

Starting a hockey team was one thing; finding the ice on which to play was another. Initially, a section of the Academy's Plimpton Playing Fields was flooded to create a rink, with decidedly mixed results. When the team played, and won, its first scheduled hockey game that same year—



against the Boston Latin School—the game took place on the town's Water Works Pond. In 1914, when Exeter played its first game against Andover, the match took place indoors, at the Boston Arena. Exeter won the game, 4-1.

In 1916, a game against Andover was played in a heavy snowstorm on a flooded soccer field. A photo from that game shows the Exeter players wearing white pants and playing on a rink with ankle-height boards and wooden goal cages. That same year, to accommodate growing interest in the sport among the student body, class hockey (i.e., intramural) teams were started.

Exeter hired its first official coach, M.B. Perkins, in 1917. Games were played on several areas of Fresh River, located about 3 miles from campus in the northwestern corner of Exeter. It's easy to picture the difficulties these early teams encountered playing without boards, on the intermittently frozen river and local ponds. Even when the Academy constructed three outdoor rinks in 1923, one for the Academy squad and two for the class teams, ice conditions were often poor. And in 1926, a scarlet fever epidemic caused many contests to be cancelled.

## THE ROGERS ERA

In 1924, Exeter hockey found its savior, in the form of a newly hired language instructor named Percy Rogers. Rogers became a dominant figure, not only at Exeter but throughout the New England high-school hockey world. During his 25 years as head coach, his hockey teams played 208 regulation games, and compiled a record of 115 wins, 75 losses and 18 ties. That record includes 20 victories over Andover, and eight major tournament titles. He also served as vice president of the Eastern Hockey Officials Association and president of the Northern New England Hockey Officials Association.

In 1930, hockey joined football, track and baseball as a "major" sport at the Academy, and that year's team, led by Captains Frank Spain '31 and Art Lane '30, responded with an undefeated season, including a 4-0 victory over Andover. One of the most unusual games in school history took place the following year, against Lawrence Academy: owing to mild weather, the teams played one period on each of the Academy's three rinks.

In 1937, Exeter was one of eight teams invited to compete in a hockey tournament sponsored by the Northwood School and

held at Lake Placid during the Christmas vacation (the others were Andover, Williston, Choate, Nichols, Morristown and Albany). After defeating Northwood and Nichols, Exeter faced Albany in the finals, a game that stretched to five overtime periods, ending in a 1-1 tie and a shared trophy. That same year, Exeter completed a new natural ice rink with the first permanent boards, a standard arena surface area, and covered shelter nearby where players could warm themselves between periods.

Noteworthy players from this period include several Olympians: John Chase '24, who won a silver medal at the 1932 Olympics as a member of the U.S. team; Frank Spain '31, a bronze medalist at the 1936 games; and Don Whiston '48, a silver medalist in 1952.

Hank Bothfeld '49—Exeter's leading scorer until 1997, with 71 goals and 50 assists for 121 points—went on to great success at Princeton, where, as captain of the 1953 team, he led Prince-



ton to the league championship and was named an All-American. In 1955, he played on the U.S. national hockey team in the World Championships.

## ARTIFICIAL ICE—FINALLY!

February 13, 1954 marked the inauguration of a new outdoor rink with artificial ice. The 200-foot by 85-foot regulation rink overcame once and for all the uncertainties of carrying on a hockey program in the face of changing weather conditions. To mark the occasion, games were scheduled against the Harvard freshmen (a win for the Exeter varsity) and the Percy Rogers Alumni All-Stars versus the Exeter JV (a win for the All-Stars). Rogers, who stepped down as coach in 1949 and was succeeded by Phil Wilson, described the new rink as "perfect, well-lighted, with good boards, excellent ice-cleaning facilities and spectator accommodations."

Over the next few years, the new rink translated into a lot more ice time for PEA teams; in 1957, for example, the rink was closed on account of weather for just eight days out of a 108-day schedule. More ice time meant an increasing depth of skating skills.

In 1959, the varsity team, coached by Wilson and Principal William Saltonstall '24, played 20 games, winning 15 and scoring





at least one goal in every game—including the Andover game, in which an early goal by defenseman Webb Nichols '59 held up for a 1-0 victory over the Blue. Co-captain John Cook '59 set a new record for the most number of goals (27) in a single season to that date. (Cook still holds the career goal-scoring record at Princeton, with 67.)

In 1960, Bill Clark '31, Exeter's longtime football coach, succeeded Wilson as ice hockey coach. His 1961 team had a particularly strong season, with a 15-2 record; they scored 104 goals and allowed just 29. They were followed three years later by what Clark described as "the best team of all time." In fact, the 1964 varsity team went undefeated until the final two seconds of their season, when Belmont Hills scored a buzzer-beater that left the team with a 16-1 record. Nine of those 16 wins were by one-goal margins, including four in sudden-death overtime.

Perhaps the sweetest of those one-goal victories came in the team's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary game against Andover. Skating at Andover before a large crowd, the two teams matched goals in the first period. After a scoreless second period that saw the Exeter defense prevail against a hard-skating Blue attack, Exeter converted its best chance with only three minutes remaining and won, 2-1, for the first time in five years.

MCMNAMARA, TIM BOYD COACHES: PEA ARCHIVES



## THE MODERN ERA

The completion of the George H. Love Gymnasium in 1970 ushered in the modern hockey era at the Academy. With its two indoor hockey rinks, the gym supports simultaneous play by both the boys and girls teams.

Patrick Dennehy '92, son of Coach Bill Dennehy (who led the boys varsity team from 1975 to 1992), became the second highest all-time scorer in 1992, with 39 goals and 75 assists for 114 points. In 1991, he was a member of the NH all-star hockey team that bested 28 other state teams to win the national title in Chicago. The current all-time leading scorer for the Exeter boys is Russell Bartlett '97, who amassed 275 career points with 102 goals and 173 assists, and went on to play at St. Lawrence.

Geoff Koch '98 (177 total career points) went from Exeter to win a national championship at Michigan in his freshman year, and later became captain of the Wolverines before being picked in the second round of the NHL draft by the Nashville Predators.

In 1999, the boys varsity won the New England Championship with a 30-3 overall record. This team was captained by Manchester, NH native Greg

Boucher '99, who went on to play at Yale. Boucher was co-MVP for the season, along with Josh Prudden '99. Prudden was named Prep School Player of the Year, went on to play at UNH and now plays in the AHL for the Worcester Sharks. One of his Worcester teammates is Tommy Cavanagh '01, who holds the PEA records for the most goals scored in a season (42).

## GIRLS HOCKEY DEBUTS

The girls hockey program was founded in 1975, making Exeter one of the first prep schools to have a girls ice hockey team. Coached by Peter Vorkink, the 1975 team had a 6-5 record, followed in 1976 by a respectable 8-8 record, including an exciting double-overtime win over Dartmouth. Despite the relative inexperience of most of the girls and a lack of practice time, the 1976 team finished strongly, winning five of their last six games. Co-captain and MVP Ellie Horrigan '76 led the offense, while co-captain Kim Schell '76 and Debbie Cunningham '78 proved a formidable first defense.

Charlie Pratt '52 coached the girls team from 1980 to 1985. A standout player from that period was Deb Taft '80, who, along with Leonie Glen '80, anchored a strong defense over several years. Taft was captain of the 1980 team, which dominated its season that year thanks to its depth and teamwork. Deb's sister, Marty Taft '75, was assistant coach that year as well.

Lee Dillenbeck Young '82, co-captain of the girls 1982 team and one of its high scorers, rejoined the team as head coach in 1987 and led the team through 2000. That year, an exceptionally strong girls team won the Division I New England Championship, led by team MVP Kerri Sanders '01, who went on to a solid career at Boston College. The co-captains were Kaitlin McGrath '00 and

*The Exeter hockey program includes a long line of outstanding players, such as Emily McNamara '03 (top), captain and MVP of the 2003 team. Boys varsity coaches include (from left) George Crowe, Bill Clark '31, Percy Rogers, Charlie Pratt '52 and Phil Wilson.*

Kathryn Koch '00.

Emily McNamara '03 was captain and MVP of the 2003 team. While at Exeter, she had the distinction of earning 12 varsity letters in four different sports. She went on to a successful career at Middlebury College, where she was a part of two NCAA Championship and two NESCAC Championship teams during her four years. She was twice named to the All-NESCAC team, while also earning All-NESCAC Academic honors. McNamara was a member of the NCAA All-Tournament team in '05 and served as a captain during her senior year at Middlebury. Carrying on an Exeter tradition of mentoring young athletes, she just completed her first season as Middlebury's new assistant women's hockey coach. ●