

Sports

'Canadian Connection' brings winning ways to AQ hockey

By Richard A. Kiley

The mention of the "French Connection" line brings back fond memories for many western New York hockey fans who followed the Buffalo Sabres in the 1970s.

"The Canadian Connection" has now begun its legacy at Aquinas Institute, where the Little Irish have been playing hockey like one of the Sabres' long-time nemeses — you know, that team that plays in Montreal.

The arrival of a new principal and a new hockey coach — both with Canadian roots — has coincided with the advent of an undefeated season for the Little Irish (12-0-1).

"Father Gardner is from St. Michael's in Toronto, and I'm originally from Ontario, and he said that when, (the Aquinas administration) brought him in as principal and me into coach the hockey team, they did the right thing," coach Rich Gamble joked.

Since the arrival of the "Canadian Connection" the Little Irish hockey players — mostly young and inexperienced ones at that — have been doing a lot of things right.

"The teamwork concept is the key; everyone knows what their role is," said Gamble, who played hockey at Brown University in the early '70s. "Our accomplishments have all been a total team effort."

Although his newcomer's unbeaten record speaks for itself, the team's to AQ hockey is hesitant to take any of the credit for his club's nearly perfect season. He lets his players do the talking on the ice, where the Little Irish have outscored opponents 88-14 this season.

And although the results are the same, the play of the Little Irish isn't Edmonton Oilers-like or flashy in any way. Gamble admits he has no real superstars, just a bunch of hard-working players who want to continue the winning tradition at the Dewey Avenue Catholic high school.

"Hockey has always had an excellent tradition at Aquinas," said Gamble, who has been active coaching in Rochester Youth Hockey Leagues for several years.

This year, however, has been extra good for hockey enthusiasts at AQ, who were out in abundance last Saturday, Jan. 23, to watch the Little Irish take on 1987 Section 5 runner-up McQuaid (5-4-4).

The Monroe Hockey League game featured a scoring clinic by Rick Alloco, who scored three goals and assisted on two others to become only the 32nd player in the history of the league to score 100 points in his career. Aquinas beat McQuaid, 7-2, in the game played at Lakeshore Rinks.

"Rick Alloco has displayed quiet leadership for us," said Gamble, whose father, Dick, played for the Rochester Americans.

Aquinas was also bolstered by two goals and two assists from Chris Fess.

Fess is just a sophomore on a team packed with underclassmen. In all, Aquinas has 11 sophomores and four freshmen to go along with several juniors and seniors.

Although the Little Irish have had plenty of scoring this year, thanks to the likes of Alloco, Fess, Aaron Gibalski (30 points) and Jeff Nuccitelli, the play of the defense has been scintillating.

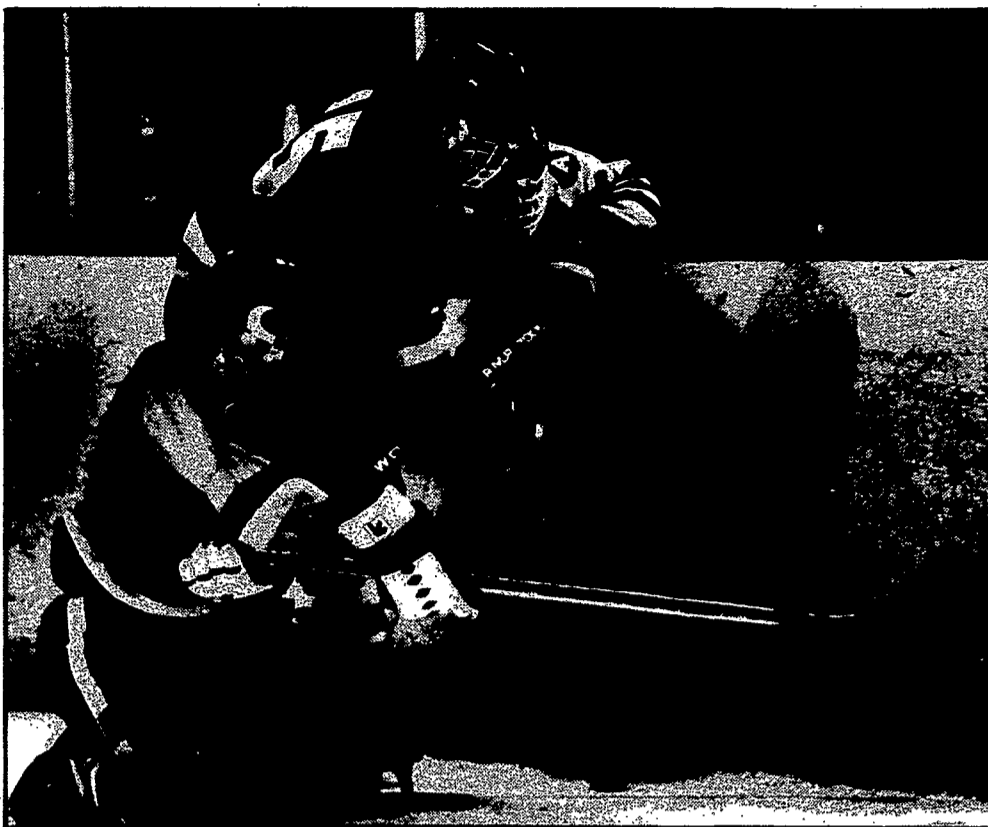
"I had to mold a new defense when I came here," said Gamble, who will be an assistant coach at the Empire State Games later this year. "We're very disciplined on defense. I run a disciplined system, that's the Canadian in me."

The defense never rests either, where Gamble's son, Jon, a sophomore, and freshman Jason Mucha have been stalwarts all season. Rich Sloan has also been one of the Little Irish's mainstays in front of goalie Bob Carello.

Carello has been a story unto himself. After a trip to Colorado recently, he ranked the No. 2 15-year-old stopper in the nation. The "other" Little Irish netminder, Mike Kearns, has not been scored on in the three games he has played either.

Aquinas' season has not been free from adversity. Around Christmastime, Gamble lost Dave Hemmerick — one of his prolific scorers — to a broken leg. "It was a hairline fracture," Gamble said. "He'll start skating this week and should be back soon."

In the only "blemish" on the Little Irish's record, Aquinas needed some late-scoring heroics to forge a 4-4 tie against Section 5 champion Batavia back on December 19. "We've been through some pressure situations," Gamble said. "Some of the seniors have said they don't know how to react to how we're doing



McQuaid's Ralph Tisa (on his knees) and Dennis Hyatt try to take the puck from Aquinas Lakeshore Rinks. Aquinas is now 12-0-1 for the season.

because they've never been in this situation before."

These are good times for hockey fans at Aquinas.

"We've had some peaks and valleys this season," Gamble observed. "When the defense

was struggling, the offense came through and when the offense struggled, the defense tightened up. The talent has always been there at Aquinas, they just haven't put it all together."

At least not like "The Canadian Connection" has.

Fr. Charles Curran to speak at St. Mary's forum luncheon

The Downtown Community Forum's first luncheon/lecture of the winter/spring season will feature Father Charles E. Curran.

Father Curran, who for several years has been locked in a dispute with Church authorities over his theological dissent from non-infallible Church teachings, will address the forum on Wednesday, Feb. 3, from noon to 1:30

p.m. at the Rochester Plaza Hotel. His topic will be "Religion and Politics in the USA: Moral Arguments and Public Policy."

Tickets for the forum, which is sponsored by St. Mary's Church, are \$12 and are selling quickly. They can be reserved by calling (716)232-7140.

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