

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Ice, Ice Baby

Hockey team members go out of their way in pursuit of their passion for ice

By Jose Cruz
THE BATTALION

When Colin Spence, a wildlife and fisheries science graduate student at Texas A&M, moved to Texas from Canada, he thought his hockey-playing days were done. Although Spence's decision to move to Texas was purely academic, he quickly realized that A&M would satisfy his athletic needs as well.

"If it wasn't for the (Student Recreation Center) club team, I wouldn't be playing hockey," he said.

Spence grew up in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and recently moved to Texas to pursue a graduate degree. Spence said that in Canada, hockey is considered the most popular sport.

"I started playing when I was 5 years old in a community league," Spence said. "In Canada, hockey is a part of the culture. Everyone grows up around hockey so it's only natural that you start playing at a young age."

The Rec Center offers students a chance to play organized team sports that compete with other universities around the state. The sports range from archery to volleyball. The ice hockey team is growing in popularity every year and will finally have an ice rink close to the University.

Most players on the Aggie Ice Hockey team began playing hockey at a very young age. Peter Hince, a senior political science major, started playing street hockey at age 9.

"I started playing when I was living in Virginia. Growing up, we really didn't have a problem finding ice rinks to play in," Hince said. "Some of the players have been playing ice hockey as early as the age of 3."

Those passionate about playing hockey in Texas, however, may find it difficult to find a place to play. Among the many sports club teams the Rec Center offers, ice hockey seems an unlikely sport Texas students would play. Texas is not a state that is regarded as being a center for ice hockey, because historically ice hockey has been played in colder climates.

Many Texas players said they had difficulty finding a place to play growing up.

"There was only one league in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, and I had to drive 45 minutes to get there," said Thomas Shephard, a freshman construction science major.

However, the popularity of ice hockey in Texas has grown tremendously in the past decade.

"A lot of people don't know this, but Texas actually has

the most number of pro ice hockey teams of any state," said Nick Hanson, a junior computer engineering major.

David Tedone, a freshman business major, said that 10 years ago there were no teams, but now there are college and even high school teams in Texas. According to many players, it is the speed and aggressive characteristics of ice hockey that make it one of the fastest growing sports in Texas. Tedone said his first experience with ice hockey came from a P.E. class in high school.

College Station will see an effect of the rising popularity of ice hockey when the Wolf Pen Creek ice rink is completed later this year.

Hansen said he was surprised when he heard the news about the new ice rink.

"We have been looking forward to someone building a rink for us, and we got close last year, but it was never finalized. I'm really excited; there's a lot of people involved in making the new rink a reality," Hansen said.

The players seemed enthusiastic about the new ice rink being built in College Station. The Wolf Pen Creek facility will serve as the home rink for the ice hockey team in the future.

Currently, the players travel to Houston for home games and practices at the Willowbrook Aerodrome complex.

The team usually leaves College Station at 7 p.m. and doesn't get back until midnight, Tedone said.

Most other teams they play against have their rinks very close to campus. The A&M team however is forced to only practice once a week due to the location of the rink.

"It's hard to maintain the intensity before a game sitting in a van for over an hour on the way to a game," Spence said.

The new rink will afford the team more time on the ice and more opportunities for expansion.

"I think with the new rink we will improve as a team. We will get to practice more, develop team chemistry and expose the school to ice hockey," Spence said.

Tedone agreed and added that he thinks the new rink will also serve as a good recruiting tool for the team.

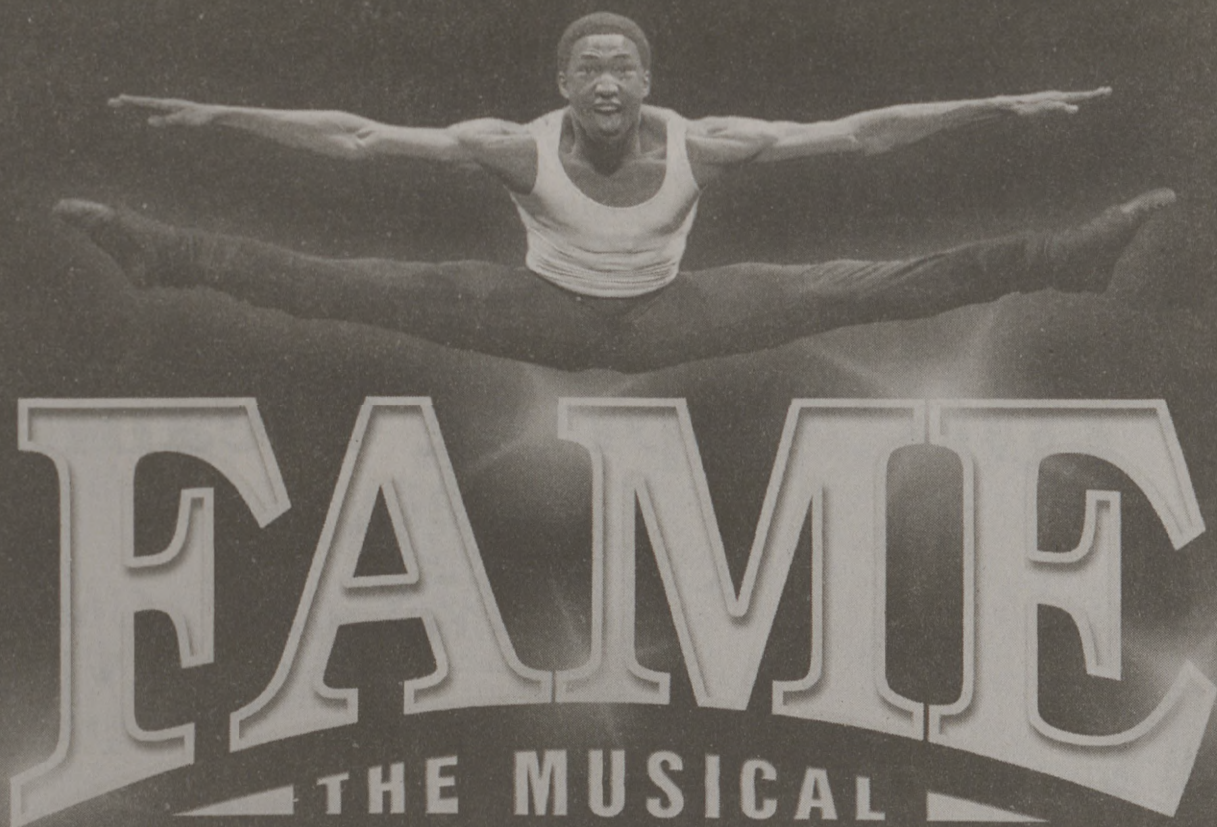
The team said it was enthusiastic about next year's season, even if it meant having to work harder at time management. The long season begins in October and ends in February, forcing the players to budget their time over the course of two semesters. Many Aggies play on club teams mostly for fun, but don't underestimate the ice hockey club team's competitive edge.

"We take it seriously. I've seen some club teams that don't take it that serious, but we do," Hansen said.



COURTESY OF • A&M ICE HOCKEY TEAM

Francois Gentis, a junior international studies major, speeds across the ice while attempting to keep the puck away from opposing players on the University of North Texas team. The Texas A&M ice hockey team drives into Houston several times a week in order to have a practice facility.



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