

# Brothers kept Rhinelander hockey teams active in '40s

The recent death of Maynard "Jake" Sweo at the age of 84 sparked the memories of older Rhinelander sports fans who could recall the years when the three Sweo brothers performed with the city's hockey team, paving the way for several other sets of brothers who played in the years after World War II.

Claire "Toot" Sweo was the first to play with the city team, which used a rink on Oneida Avenue at the present Pioneer Park layout. He soon was joined by Maynard and Clayton. That was in the early 1930s, when the team was known as the Rhinos.

Old files of The Daily News tell of the games against teams from Wausau, Eagle River, Eau Claire and Upper Peninsula communities. The team started the 1931 season with three victories, with Claire Sweo starring.

There were three other sets of brothers on the team—Stewart, Jim and Don Barncard, Jim, John and Mike Stafford, and Matt and Tony Vancos. Other players included Jess Medhurst, Kermit Ek, Dave Holmes and players identified only by last names of Barlow and Willette.

The Sweos played with the Rhinelander team until the late 1930s. There were not many cities in Wisconsin with hockey teams then, so it was difficult to

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By Kris Gilbertson



book games on a regular basis. The Daily News files show that a number of games had to be cancelled because of snowstorms or warm spells which turned outdoor rinks into slush.

Maynard Sweo died Sept. 11 this year, while Clayton died Feb. 23, 1980, and Claire died Nov. 29, 1981. Early in 1947, when he was 37, Claire has his right arm badly mangled in an accident in the Rhinelander Paper Company plant.

After World War II the city hockey team was called the Hornets and it was so good it won the state amateur title three times in the early 1950s. The Hornets had the Jaroski brothers as mainstays, with Walt and Ed on defense and Joe operating from a wing position. Ray Jaroski was a spare, according to team listings in The Daily News sport pages.

Other players included Bob Netling, Eddie Pecore and Harley Savage, who served as goalies at different times; Wayne Bodwin,

Ralph Mischnick, Ken Cheslock, Ed Danilko, Lawrence Dahl, Pete Predith, Ray Blonski, Kermit Ek, Vern Beaudhuin and Pat Stafford.

The Hornets won the state title in 1950, repeated in 1951, lost to Madison in 1952 and regained the crown in 1953. The team won the Northern Wisconsin Amateur Hockey League title as well in 1953. It was formed in 1947 but did not play a full schedule until 1948.

Rhinelander was quite a hockey town in the 1950s. The high school team won the Wisconsin Valley Conference championship several times and the PeeWee League entry was selected to represent Wisconsin in the national tournament in St. Paul in 1953.

And fans remember all of those games were played outdoors, with players and supporters often having to shovel snow off the playing surface if a snowstorm hit on a game day. The only indoor rink in the region was at Eagle River.

Some fans called the 1953 team the best, for it swept through a tough schedule and breezed through the state tournament. It beat Eagle River three times and beat teams from Antigo, Mosinee, Madison, Green Bay and several Upper Michigan cities.