

The Essex County Juvenile Hockey League 1961-1971

The Essex County Juvenile Hockey League was formed in 1961, in the first year of the Essex Arena. It emerged from the Juvenile Church League in Leamington. Two original teams, Essex and Cottam, organized the new league and invited Anderdon, Sandwich South, Kingsville and Harrow.

The league lasted for ten years eventually succumbing to the minor hockey travel teams. Arnold Axcell, George Simpkins and Jim Stitt were the founders of the Sandwich South Team. They switched names from Sandwich when Sandwich South dropped their sponsorship and Maidstone Township stepped up. It is believed that the Maidstone Hornets won the league championship in 1965-66 as well.

During the ten years that the league existed, crowds filled the Essex Arena to capacity every Friday night to watch the three games being played. With standing room only and fans guarding their positions at the railings, the arena rocked with the shouts and cheers of enthusiastic fans both young and old. Friendly rivalries, spirited on the back of "community pride" made this sporting event the highlight of each week during the long winter months. The county has never witnessed such an enormous, ardent and diversified fan following for one sporting league since.

(Courtesy of Lonnie Jones, the Essex Free Press's, Evelyn Couch Smith and Judy Wellwood-Robson)

MAIDSTONE HORNETS 1966-67 LEAGUE & P.O CHAMPS

In 1966-67, we won 20 straight games sweeping the league and playoff championship. We swept the major awards as well. Jim Mahon won the scoring championship, Louie Dallaire the best defenseman, Fred Lessard the best goalie and either Jim or Joe Meihls MVP.

We followed that by winning our first 2 series in the Ontario Juvenile C play downs. We suffered our first loss of the season in Bolton by a score of 8 - 6 on a very fast small ice rink. After the shock of our first loss, we returned to Essex and these young adults rose for the occasion in their next home game. We were tied 3 - 3 when midway thru the second period Jim Mahon's skate blade broke. Even with this mishap, we ended the game in a 4 - 4 tie winning the Dudley Memorial Cup as runner up in Ontario Juvenile C Championship.

The next year we lost a number of key players however, we still won the league and playoff championships.

(As told by Coach Lonnie Jones)