



Becky Simpson



Pat Denny

Staff photos

# Hockey girls game, too

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The game of hockey: Compact yet well-built males who skate with blazing speed and throw bruising body checks.

That's no game for a young lady, right?

Well, that's wrong, at least in the Mason City Youth Hockey Association ranks.

The local YHA can boast not one but two females playing hockey — Becky Simpson at the Pee Wee level (ages 12-13) and Pat Denny for the high school team.

Don't get the idea that these two are just tokens. "Pat is probably one of the few high school-age girls in the country who is playing a contact sport," says her coach, John Pete.

And in attesting to the 16-year-old Charles City girl's ability on the ice, he said, "She's as good a hockey player as most of my boys. She's maybe not quite as fast, but she's intelligent and strong on her skates. She takes her licks and hits back hard."

Denny is one of Pete's top four defensemen and while she hasn't scored a goal for Mason City (currently 3-2 in Iowa Division II league play, non-sanctioned by the Iowa High School Athletic Association), she has a couple of assists.

Pat is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Denny and one of only two non-Mason City residents on the high school team. The other is Mike Aspeborg, a foreign exchange student from Sweden currently attending Charles City High.

Pat's interest in hockey developed about a decade ago when her family lived in northwest Chicago. Her older brother Mike, now a junior varsity player for Iowa State University, played a lot of sandlot hockey and "I just started tagging along and pretty soon I was playing," said Pat. "I liked the fast action."

Five years ago, the Dennys moved to Charles City. Two years later, she heard about the Mason City hockey program and asked if she could play.

The answer was yes and when Denny first showed up for practice, the boys

really didn't treat her badly at all. "Some of them said 'Look, there's a girl.' But as soon as we got on the ice, they decided I wasn't afraid to hit," Pat said.

As for this year's high school teammates, "the guys have accepted me real well. They know I'm out there to play hockey...Some of the guys on the other team aren't too sure at first. Once we're playing, though, they forget about everything except hockey."

Pete qualified that statement a bit. "If someone on the other team gets a little dirty with her...our guys sometimes protect her, though she may not know it. But really, she doesn't need it."

Otherwise, "her relationship with the team is just like that of any other player. When we had tryouts at the beginning of the year it was obvious she could help the team. You have to see her to appreciate her. Once she puts that helmet on, you don't know that she's there (that she's a girl)," said Pete.

Denny would recommend the sport to other girls with the following recommendation: "If they like to skate enough and if they're not intimidated by guys, it's a great sport (for girls)."

Physical strength in hockey isn't as important as "just knowing how to hit," Pat added.

However, Pat felt separate leagues for boys and girls "like they have in Des Moines" are best in the long run as more girls get to play.

Denny said her father "loves the attention I get. He's the basic proud parent." The only thing he and his wife Laura aren't very fond of is the 32-mile drive from Charles City to Mason City for practices and games.

Denny is also a varsity softball player (she's lettered since her freshman year) and golfer. But hockey is her favorite because "it's the most exciting."

Becky Simpson, daughter of Donald

and Maxine of Mason City, started playing hockey this year because "it just sounded interesting" and because some of her friends encouraged her to play.

The boys have "treated me fine" and the competition hasn't proven to be too difficult, she said. Her parents think "it's great," her coaches encouraged her to play and "I think it's fun."

Fair enough. But will you be back for more next year, Becky? "Yea," she said without hesitation.

And so will Pat Denny. So, move over a little more, male chauvinists. Another of your traditional strongholds has been invaded.