



## HEAVY HARDWARE



# BUILT ON A BRO-MANCE

*Long-running pools like the Innocuous League and Franchise Boys are fuelled not just by passion for hockey, but by friendship*

BY GUSTAV KOUMANTAROS

LAST YEAR, THN FEATURED a story about the Original Six fantasy league, which dates back to 1979. It got great feedback. This year, we showcase two more pools.

During the fall of 1978, Greg Williamson, alongside Bob Milloy, Rick Wallis, Lloyd Johansen, Bob Favelle and Jeff Foster, started a keeper league in which teams retained players year-to-year, like an NHL franchise. The six fantasy freaks, based out of greater Vancouver, dubbed their version of an original six the "IHL" (Innocuous Hockey League). "We didn't really have a word for the 'I,'" Williamson says. "So it was inane or innocuous or idiotic."

The IHL, which has expanded to 13 teams, plays a balanced weekly head-to-head schedule. The top seven squads make the playoffs, and the finalists battle in a two-week match for

the Skobotski Cup, named after made-up hockey legend Bobby Skobotski. Deemed the hardest trophy to win in sports, it's also the heaviest, weighing 60 pounds. "The Skobotski is pretty awesome," Williamson says. "I used to work as a millwright's apprentice, so I built it out of cold steel. It's a barrel about two-and-a-half feet long, with a cup-shaped fitting on top and handles welded onto the sides. It's ugly, but it's beautiful."

During a two-week final one year, Bill McDowell, well ahead of Rob Serraglio (defending champion at the time), took it upon himself to visit Rob's house while Rob was at work. "Part of the deal with the trophy is when you win it, it has to be prominently displayed in your liv-

ing room, just to kind of tick off the wives," Williamson says.

McDowell, who figured he'd already won, took the Cup from Serraglio. Not only did McDowell end up losing to Serraglio in the final, but, as "punishment for his sins," he is now responsible for putting the winner's name on a plaque on the trophy every year.

Despite the occasional controversy, the IHL has always been about fun. "There's no entry fee, there's no money won at the end of the season, it's all about bragging rights and bulls---," Williamson says. "We're just a bunch of old farts having fun, with hockey and friendship as the basis."

This same measure of camaraderie and friendship marks the relationship of Nick Malandrucolo, Joe DiTomaso, Louis Cortina, Joe Laranjo, Paolo Zaccero, Johnny Palmeria, Steve Karaminas, Claudio Masella, Giacomo D'Agostino and Mike Tempone. They make up the Montreal-based NHL Franchise Boys, a league into its

20th season. "We had no notion of other pools," Malandrucolo says. "We decided we'll try to get a few people that were interested and committed to a franchise pool where we get to keep a certain amount of players every year."

On their website, [nhlfranchiseboys.com](http://nhlfranchiseboys.com), you'll find a detailed record of stats, trades and free agent signings. You'll also find a lengthy constitution, which is "thicker than most companies' prospectus and financial reports," as Zaccero puts it.

The Franchise Boys play for money, but that hasn't gotten in the way of what has become an important part of their lives. Their shared passion has kept this band of brothers together for years. And the bond comes in handy as each member endures ups and downs in his personal life. The day after making his final moves for season 13, Karaminas suffered a stroke. "Everything stopped then, it didn't matter what happened," Malandrucolo says. "That's when we realized this is not just friends playing. This is family."

Karaminas recovered and the hockey family is as tight as ever, so tight that nothing can get in way of the pool. Cortina's daughter is getting married this fall. Her original date was Oct. 4, but Louis had her change it to the 18th, so as not to interfere with draft weekend. Now that's dedication. **THN**

