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Trinity Hockey: N-ice To Be Home

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There were 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. off-campus practices, but not too many players raised a stink. The coach used to carry the puck bucket and hockey laundry in his car back to campus, and that did a raise a big stink.

Maybe it always was worth it, but finally, on Friday, all the sacrifices will make sense.

Trinity has been playing men's hockey for 46 years, starting as a club team in 1960, but has never had a home rink. And whether it was the outdoor ice at Colt Park in Hartford or the rink at Kingswood-Oxford School in West Hartford, every practice, every game, has been a road trip of some kind.

That ends Friday when the doors of the \$15.5 million Trinity College Community Sports Complex open for the Wesleyan-Trinity women's game at 4 p.m., followed by the Hamilton-Trinity men's game at 7:30. Both Trinity teams are opening their seasons.



JOHN DUNHAM has overseen Trinity's men's hockey since before it gained varsity status in 1974 and now has a glistening new campus rink after years of driving to practice and home games in such places as Glastonbury and West Hartford. "John has gone above and beyond the call," says Mark Cleary, Trinity's first varsity captain in 1974-75. (YOON S. BYUN)

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"I've stopped by the site several times every week since the groundbreaking [Nov. 6, 2005], men's coach John Dunham said. "It's like a dream. I appreciate it so much for the players, former players, the college and everyone who has supported the program. It gives me the feeling that, 'you know, we did something right.'"

No one deserves more accolades than Dunham, who's No.6 on the all-time Division III wins list. With a 433-293-30 record in 32 varsity seasons, he is Trinity hockey.

Dunham, 65, started as a volunteer goalie coach for the club team in 1967. He was named head coach in 1971 and has been behind the Bantams bench ever since.

He was there for the lean years and the achievements, which include varsity status in 1974, ECAC Division III titles in 1986-88 and '91, defeating Middlebury for the NESCAC championship and Trinity's first NCAA tournament berth in 2003, and reaching the Final Four in 2005.

"John has gone above and beyond the call," said Mark Cleary, the captain of Trinity's first varsity team in 1974-75. "How does a coach recruit players against Middlebury [eight-time NCAA champion] and Amherst without a campus rink? And to put a team in the Final Four without a rink on campus. Amazing."

Dunham deflects the praise. He would rather focus on his players, who practiced at whatever ice times were available, stuffed equipment bags and squeezed into cars to get to practice and games.

But one cold November night in 1986, Dunham sensed a problem.

"We were practicing at Loomis [in Windsor] at 11 because Kingswood's rink had a pipe problem," Dunham said. "Some of the guys weren't responding. I called them together and said, 'OK, what are we going to do? When our losses are called into The Courant and the Boston Globe, do you want an asterisk by them, so people can feel sorry for us because we practice at 11 at night? I want can-do guys out here or let's just pack it in

About Trinity's New Rink

Name: Trinity College Community Sports Complex

Location: New Britain Avenue and Broad Street, Hartford

Cost: \$15.5 million. Private donations and a \$2 million state bond in exchange for providing 15 hours a week for community usage. Donations still being accepted.

Williams Ice Rink surface: 200 by 90 feet. The rink is named in memory of Trinity player Albert B. Williams (Class of 1964), who died while he was an undergraduate.

Capacity: 1,300

Features: Six varsity team rooms, fitness room, three community rooms, trainer's room, equipment room. "The original plans had metal lockers, but I felt that didn't befit the program," said Bryant McBride, the NHL vice president of business development in 1992-2000, a 1988 graduate and a consultant for the new rink. "I wrote the check [for more spacious, open wooden lockers]."

Who will use the facility: Trinity varsity hockey and club teams; Trinity students, faculty and staff; high school hockey teams from Southington, Avon Old Farms, South Kent, Kent and Westminster; CIAC playoffs; Hartford public schools; Hartford-area Catholic schools; Hartford Boys and Girls Clubs; Hartford residents (for daily free skate); Connecticut Polar Bears girls/women's program (including 275-team holiday tournament); Northern Lights girls/women's hockey program; Connecticut Hockey Conference playoffs (43 organizations in the state, each with several age levels); USA Coaching Education Program; Connecticut Speedskating Club; Connecticut Broomballers; Trinity Learn To Skate (figure skating) and Learn To Play Hockey programs.

Former homes: Some sites where the Trinity's men's hockey team played or practiced, 1960-2006: Colt Park (Hartford), Wesleyan Arena (Middletown), Enfield Twin Rinks, Kingswood-Oxford School and Veterans Memorial Rink (West Hartford), Eastern States Coliseum (West Springfield, Mass.), Glastonbury Arena, Newington Arena, Bolton Ice Palace, South Windsor Arena, Loomis Chaffee School (Windsor), Champions Skating Center (Cromwell).

Sources: Trinity office of advancement and office of communications.

and default the whole season."

Trinity finished that season 26-1 and won the ECAC title.

"It meant more for us to win than those guys who just rolled out of their dorm beds and walked to their rink," said Bryant McBride, a defenseman from the Class of 1988. "We had to sacrifice - car pool to practice, run the concession stand at football games to help out on the team's financial end. We were resilient as hell."

As was the coach, of course.

"My car has carried the puck bucket and sometimes the laundry bags," Dunham said. "I can't remember what kind of car it was, but it was a fast one, and it had a terrible odor sometimes."

The Little Spark

Dunham is a 1969 graduate of the UConn Law School and worked 36 years in a variety of legal positions in state government. He retired from the state last year, but still has two jobs.

"I wear two hats now," he said. "I'm an associate director of leadership giving for Trinity and the men's hockey coach. It's funny because my career goal when I went to Brown was to be a trial attorney.

"When I was a freshman I met with my faculty adviser and he said, 'Oh, Dunham. What do you play, goalie? Are you good?' And I said, 'I'm good enough to play for this team. I don't know if that makes me any good, though.' And he said, 'Oh, a smart guy.'

"Well, I was 5-6 and weighed 135 pounds and was the starting goalie for an Ivy League team. You've got to have a little spark in you."

All these years later he's still slight of build, he wears glasses and he might not look like a hockey coach. But he's a winner, he's tough and he hasn't lost the spark.

"When I went to Brown, I had no intentions of being involved in hockey after I had graduated [in 1965 with a degree in history],"



ONE of Trinity's homes away from home was Colt Park, where the club team played this game outdoors in 1966.

(TRINITY COLLEGE)

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Dunham said.

Then his wife Susan began working with computers at The Travelers.

"Jack Hurley, a former hockey player at Dartmouth, was her boss," Dunham said. "And I was playing in the old Southern New England Hockey League at the Hartford Arena. One of Jack's friends was Ray Batson, who was Trinity's club coach. He knew I had been a goalie at Brown, so I was asked and I helped out the Trinity goalies at Colt Park in the late '60s."

Batson resigned in January 1971 and was replaced by Dunham.

"When I was at Brown, hockey was big," he said. "When I came to Hartford, hockey was at the bottom of the totem pole. At the beginning of my time at Trinity I just wanted to spread the gospel about hockey."

He has done much more than that.

"When I recruit players, I want 100-percenters," Dunham said. "They never tell you they're 100-percenters. The BS players tell you that. I don't want excuse-makers. Those guys don't get the puck out of the corners. I always look for players who want to go to the rink."

Around The Rinks

And one thing was certain, the Bantams were familiar with going to the rink.

"When we played at the Wesleyan Arena [1970-72] some of our players knew the state troopers by their first names because they may have been going a little too fast on I-91," Dunham said.

Cleary remembers the Glastonbury Arena, Trinity's home in 1972-80, having a "sun field."

"It shined through the windows and made it tough to see the puck at the far end," said Cleary, a right wing and No. 7 on the career goals list with 62. "But being the home team we'd only fight the sun for one period during those afternoon games."

Clint Brown, a center and winger from the Class of '79, has one regret, though.

"The locker room was nice, and we shared the training room with the Whalers [after the Civic Center roofed collapsed in '78]," he said. "And Gordie Howe was there in the whirlpool. Gordie Howe. An autograph, get his stick. I didn't do either. Too shy, I guess."

Just like the rink at Colt Park, the Glastonbury Arena no longer exists. The Glastonbury Arena was sold and became a chicken hatchery. It's now a vacant building.

The Bantams moved to the Kingswood-Oxford rink, which has been home for the men's and the women's teams since 1980.

The women's team also started as a club team, and after six years received varsity status in 1998. Andrew McPhee of the women's team and Dunham were named NESCAC coaches of the year in 2005.

Now both teams have a home, one that athletic director Rick Hazelton wants to benefit the community, too.

"We've waited many years for this, so it's just tremendous," he said. "We're very serious about getting Hartford residents skating. How-to-skate programs, figure skating, youth and adult leagues, we're going to do all of that too. It would be great in a few years down the road for Hartford Public, Bulkeley and Weaver to field a co-op high school hockey team."

Dunham knows what he'll feel Friday.

"I think the most emotional time for me will be before the game when I look into our players' eyes," he said. "The excitement of playing at home will shine through."

Cleary expects to be there.

"I'm down in New Jersey, but I won't mind this drive," he said. "I don't know how many former players will be there. But when the game starts, everyone who ever played for Trinity, wherever they may be, will be on the ice, too."

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