



# STICKIN' WITH IT

Canadian Ball Hockey Korea builds a haven for camaraderie, on and off the field

Story by **Rajnish Sharma**

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Ed Leahey and Kurt DeVries had just led their team to victory in the first annual Yamato Cup in Tokyo in 2008 when they decided they wanted to keep the momentum going: They would turn their regular ball hockey group into a formal league.

The pair already had a dedicated group of players who would meet every Sunday to play pick-up games in a parking lot at Ajou University in Suwon. But they wanted more.

Scott Lumsdon, who captained the team during the tournament, recalls, "I believe our victory, coupled with an expanding membership base, spurred Kurt and Ed's desire to create the league."

What they created is now Asia's largest ball hockey organization: Canadian Ball Hockey Korea.

One of the pivotal moments in the league's history happened in 2006, back when the group was struggling to maintain its membership. Leahey proposed playing at a more central location in the capital, leading them to the Jamsil Sports Complex, the place where they still play today. Games were held every Sunday, rain or shine, and the membership grew to a core group of 20 highly committed players.

Upon returning to Korea after their victory at the Yamato Cup in October 2008, Lea-

hey, DeVries and a few key members utilized their business and social connections to recruit more members. Within two weeks, through word of mouth and media exposure, the league was born. DeVries had also managed to secure the league's first sponsor, Big Rock Brewery. Later that month, the CBHK's first season began with 55 members and four teams.

Besides the initial challenge of recruiting members, funding was a major issue. In addition to the rink fees that Leahey paid out of his own pocket, finding and purchasing goalie gear was also another obstacle.

"Communal goalie gear had to be scrounged, balls had to be purchased and shipped from Canada," says Robert Gibson, a current CBHK board member. "Sticks at Korean hockey shops were either outrageously expensive or cheap twigs that broke easily."

Since then, the CBHK has grown into an organization of 10 teams and 10 bar sponsors, a tattoo studio sponsor and a magazine sponsor (Groove Korea), with a membership of 140 players.

The league has several volunteers who organize special events such as pub crawls, parties and tournaments. Volunteers also create league rules, book rink time, track statistics, referee and goal judge, and maintain the web-

site and a weekly newsletter.

"Getting volunteers to help out with the day-to-day running of the league was difficult at first, but now I'm proud of the ways that so many people have stepped up over the years to help out in some way to ensure the league functions properly," says Cory Pettit, one of the league's first captains.

The league is open to individuals from all walks of life, both men and women, and the players are of various ages and abilities. They play two seasons, spring and fall, have two tournaments a year in Korea and have gone overseas for tournaments seven times in the last six years.

The league's 12th season kicks off on March 2. New members are encouraged to register between Jan. 16 and March 1. The draft party, one highlight of the season where captains select their new team members is set for March 1.

"Games last for two hours," Lumsdon says, "but more often than not, players and fans stay all day to enjoy the camaraderie and the spectacle. The goals and the saves are thrilling, but the banter among the players and fans alike is equally entertaining. It is simply a fun place to be on a Sunday."

GROOVE



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**MORE INFO**

The registration fee is 170,000 won in the spring and 150,000 won in the fall, or pay a month early and get a 10,000 won discount.

Players must buy their own hockey stick, which can be purchased at shops in Seoul. The league also sells sticks starting at 70,000 won. Gloves, cups and shin guards are optional, but all rookies are provided with a mouth guard upon registration.

For more information, visit [www.cbhk.org](http://www.cbhk.org) or find them on Facebook. To view league videos, visit [www.rajnesharma.com](http://www.rajnesharma.com). The league is sponsored by JR Pub, JR Southern Style BBQ, Rocky Mountain Tavern, Dillinger's, Phillies Pub, Hollywood Bar & Grill, Sam Ryan's Sports Bar & Grill, Bull & Barrel, Beer O'Clock, Yaletown Burgers & Bar, Badass Tattoo and Groove Korea.



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