



Table Hockey Night In Winnipeg

BY SCOTT TAYLOR

with notes from the Winnipeg Table Hockey League
Photos courtesy WTHL and Bahia Taylor





Sal Capizzi has always had that feeling. It started when he was a kid growing up in Winnipeg and just never went away.

There is nothing better than dropping that plastic puck and guiding your legendary Leafs and Canadiens all over the ice. You're GM, coach and player and with every win, every exciting goal, there was a rush that you just don't get in your standard video game.

"When I was growing up in the 60s and 70s, every Canadian kid would get a table hockey game for Christmas," said the 52-year-old Capizzi. "At all family occasions, you'd pull out the game and have a tournament.

"Then, as we get older, we get even more competitive, so for my family and friends, it was like, 'Let's write down the scores, let's record the standings, let's get a regular schedule drawn up,' and with that, we eventually had a league. It became a lot bigger, a lot more competitive and a lot more important than just having bragging rights."

So, with that, way back in 1989, the Winnipeg Table Hockey League was born.

Following years of exhibition table hockey matches, dating back to 1965, Sal Capizzi, Tony Capizzi, Mike Capizzi, Antonio Capizzi, Brian Clement and Zachary Mesman got together to become the Original 6 players and they continue to be a big part of the league today.

Back in January of '89, then 22-year-old Sal Capizzi was elected president of the WTHL and the first official league game was played. The WTHL is still unique in that it uses various models of the game, instead of just one specific game, creating more challenges for the players. Various tournaments are played throughout the year and the player with the highest winning percentage at the end of the season determines the champion.

Over the years, there have been 40 different players who have participated at one time or another in the WTHL and they have

used 37 different models of the game. The variety of games used has made the tournaments very exciting giving lower-ranked players a better chance to upset a higher-ranked player as many players are dominant in one game, usually the game they grew up playing, but do not have that same dominance in other games. You might even remember some of these games, many dating back to the 1950s -- Coleco, Stiga, Super Chexx, Benej, Munro, Carleco, SoHo, Aristospel, Irwin Power Play 2, NHL Ice FX, Gretzky's Overtime, Cresta, Eagle, Perma and Gamecraft tables.

Today, the WTHL is a non-profit comprised of table hockey players located in Winnipeg and surrounding areas and it is totally committed to the advancement of the sport. In fact, the WTHL is celebrating its 30th Anniversary. It's the fourth oldest league in North America.

GIVING BACK

And it's also a league that does more than just play game. The WTHL has jumped at every opportunity to give back to the community.

This year Rogers Hometown Hockey asked the WTHL to assist them with their event in Steinbach. The league volunteered its time to help celebrate Hockey Day and invited both young and old to play table hockey at the WTHL tent. Families got a chance to play with an old time favorite and they loved every minute of it.

Each year the WTHL, with the assistance of its sponsors try to do a small part in the fight against cancer and put on the annual WTHL Challenge Cup tournament with 100 per cent of the proceeds going towards the Manitoba CancerCare Foundation. The WTHL has received letters of recognition from the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau and previous Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The WTHL has also supported the True North Youth Foundation as well as teamed up with Our Manitoba Heroes who support many charities with their events.

Table Hockey has been described as chess at 700 miles per hour. Sal Capizzi, a Physical Education teacher at Robertson School in Winnipeg, also doubles as the President of the Canadian Table Hockey Association and recently ended his term as the Continental Manager for North America for the International Table Hockey Federation. He also works with other association members throughout North America to promote the game, the CTHA Tour and



“THERE IS NOTHING BETTER THAN DROPPING THAT PLASTIC PUCK AND GUIDING YOUR LEGENDARY LEAFS AND CANADIENS ALL OVER THE ICE”

to be the representative for Canada with the ITHF.

One of the main priorities of the WTHL is to promote and teach table hockey to the new generation and in the past five years the league has introduced the game in schools throughout Winnipeg.

MORE THAN A GAME

“During the game, strategies and tactics are involved that force the player to concentrate at all times while utilizing various muscle groups,” said Sal Capizzi. “It provides the serious player with such skills as timing, speed, rhythm, fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, all while promoting sportsmanship during friendly competition.

The sport is competitive yet amicable, intense but nonviolent. “The game itself brings reality to players with more face-to-face contact in a world where too much time is being spent in virtual places with social media, texting, video gaming, and unnecessary surfing of the Internet.

“The WTHL has been invited by the Physical and Health Educators of Manitoba to present at the 2019 Manitoba Teachers Society Professional Development Day which is being held in October at the Sport for Life Centre.”

Table hockey's numbers dropped in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the rise of video games, but now,

with leagues and tournaments in various cities around the world, table hockey has once again been growing rapidly. In fact, the number of players and leagues have surpassed the numbers from the 1970s when they originally reached their peak.

“The growth of video games once hurt table hockey, but now, the Internet has helped us connect with leagues all over North America and Europe,” said Sal Capizzi. “Tournaments and leagues exist everywhere, with the World Championships being held every two years. Today a whole new generation is being introduced to the game and the level of play and the competition has never been better.” ○



PROUD SUPPORTERS OF THE WINNIPEG TABLE HOCKEY LEAGUE



www.nthl.ca



www.sohotablehockey.com

GoodLife
FITNESS



www.bringhomethedome.com



www.havingfunyet.ca

Exclusive Canadian distributor of the Stiga NHL™ Stanley Cup and Stiga Playoff 21 Table Hockey Games

Ask us about our FREE 'Pucks 4 Life' Program

Email: info@havingfunyet.ca