

H-F Hockey learning to live without home ice advantage

BY DAVID P. FUNK
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When the Homewood-Flossmoor Ice Arena was shut down last month, the H-F High School hockey team was put in an unenviable position.

The Vikings practice and play games at the rink. So when a mechanical issue caused the ice to melt on Nov. 21, the team lost its home.

"We've really loved having that home ice advantage," coach Wayne Perry said. "The parents and the fans are there. We get a lot of students coming out to support us, even teachers and administration. "Being able to look over and see the white and red in the stands is definitely huge. We've had a couple games and there weren't quite as many friends or family out there."

Ice time is a precious commodity. Teams agree to contracts with rinks for practices and games long in advance. Losing that schedule after a season has begun puts H-F in a bind. Most rinks are booked and finding a place to skate can be tough. Seven of the nine remaining

home games were able to be rescheduled at Willowbrook Ice Arena but two had to be canceled.

"For the past three years, I've always had a rink to call home and it was taken away from us," senior defenseman Charlie Knetl said. "It's always been nice having that rink right there, easily accessible."

The Vikings used to practice three times a week. When news broke that H-F Arena would be unusable, Perry reached out to his contacts in the hockey community. He was able to secure some practice times at Oak Lawn Ice Arena, Ice Valley Centre in Kankakee and The Kube Sports Complex in Hammond, Ind.

But practices are far less frequent than they would've been. What used to be done in several sessions is often condensed into one. Some drills have to be skipped entirely.

"I just gear practice to individual skills, team concepts, getting them into game-like situations. How we do in our games determines our focus in the next practice," Perry said. "If we were struggling in the defensive zone or struggling on a

breakout or catching some passes, that's what our focus will be."

Sometimes, H-F will play consecutive games without practicing at all. That puts the responsibility of staying in shape and mentally staying in the game on the players themselves. Some admitted that breaths were a little heavier than normal after the first few shifts under the new conditions.

"When we had our first game after two weeks of not being able to skate, it hit us pretty hard. We were all pretty tired," Knetl said. "I think we've started to talk about doing more off-ice conditioning to get us ready for these games."

Game preparation is different, too. The tendencies of the next opponent are now explained mostly on the whiteboard in the locker room before the first period instead of walked through on the ice.

"About 15 minutes before game time, coach Perry and our coaches usually come in and give us what our mission is today, what this team is good at. He'll talk to us about what the game play can be," sophomore goalie Jacob Sline said. "It is difficult not being able to see differ-

ent situations, if they're a big transition team or what they want to run."

Players were able to keep gear in lockers at the home rink, which is close enough to walk to after school. Things like that are luxuries most teams just don't have. The Vikings are getting a chance to see a little bit of what it's like to be without them.

"I feel like, in a way, we were kind of spoiled," senior wing Joe Boldt said. "Most other schools don't have that. The ice melting surprised everyone. It's taken a lot for the team to adjust to it and make that leap to being comfortable again and taking care of some things on their own time."

The Homewood-Flossmoor Park District, which operates the arena, said in a statement that an older refrigerant system will need to be updated and replaced. Those repairs may be finished for the next hockey season, but the Vikings will finish this one in other rinks.

"We're going to make the best of it. These are the cards we were dealt and we're going to do whatever we can to do what we can without practicing," Perry said.

H-F board accepts two bids for work on softball, baseball fields

BY MARILYN THOMAS
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The District 233 school board met in special session Wednesday, Nov. 24, to approve two bids for work on the Homewood-Flossmoor High School baseball and softball fields.

The board approved a contract with Chicago Heights Construction for \$784,215. This covers site clearing, excavation and preparation, including a new underdrain system, concrete curbing and new fencing for installation of new infield synthetic turf at the softball and baseball fields.



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Crews have started work on major improvements at the H-F High baseball field.

The board also approved a \$189,000 bid from Barton Electric of Trenton, Illi-

nois for lighting on the softball field. Superintendent Von Mansfield said add-

ing the lights meets the letter of the law for Title IX giving girls and boys teams the same facilities.

The board called a special meeting so that work could get started before winter weather set in, "so we don't lose too much of the baseball and softball seasons next spring," said Ed Wright of DLA Architects. The weather was advantageous for crews working from early in December.

Chicago Heights Construction has previously done work at H-F. The firm's last major project was the update of the natatorium, Wright said.





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