

# Yeowoman challenges soccer men at skill level

Two weeks ago, I saw my first women's soccer game. Just as it was when I first witnessed Yeowomen ice hockey, the sight of young women competing in a traditionally male sport was indeed peculiar. However nothing was as surprising and exciting as the play of one Yeowomen midfielder.

York's Shelley McNichol is one remarkable athlete. The Yeowomen captain is not simply an outstanding player. She is quite extraordinarily ahead of her time. Her soccer skills and knowledge are so superior, that her ability seriously rivals the men.

McNichol is definitely a rarity to the relatively new sport. Her domination of the flow and tempo of a university game is complete. Despite soccer's emphasis on team play, McNichol's 'game' presence is as conspicuous as a baseball pitcher.

"She has extraordinary skills, and has acquired them by unbelievable dedication for the last seven or eight years," says David Bell, coach of the soccer Yeowomen. Having McNichol as his team's captain makes life a lot easier for the coach. According to Bell, "Shelley has, in addition to her own personal ability as a player, quite a bit of coaching experience. In fact this year she is teaching a soccer course in the physical education program."

The fifth year English major is in her third year of varsity competition. However, her soccer plans far exceed the York program. Her club team, Scarborough United, are Ontario champions. As well, McNichol is the captain of the newly formed Canadian national team which will compete at the 1987 Women's World Cup in Tokyo, Japan.

Her soccer ability and experience are so rich, that it begs the dilemma of frustration concerning her need for challenges of



MEL BROITMAN

a higher calibre. It's obvious when watching McNichol in action for York, that her teammates are not able to reciprocate the level of play that McNichol initiates. As McNichol herself states, "The hardest thing is not getting frustrated at the players who are not at a high calibre of play. That is why I have been given permission to practice with the men."

Practice with the men? In reality she's good enough to do more than just practice. "Once I've got the squad picked, then I'll have her join us for the drills," says Yeomen coach Norm Crandles. "It's a little embarrassing sometimes, because she often has a better shot than many of the men. She (McNichol) has a very well defined notion of how to hit the ball," adds Crandles.

McNichol tends to play down any comparisons to the men, but Crandles is frank about her ability. "She's not missing anything in the game, and it would be quite true to say that there have been years at York that she would have been a decided asset," Crandles says. "And I've coached the men's team for five years."

Leaving comparisons to the men aside, McNichol, in her own right, is a pioneer in a rapidly growing sport. She represents a level for younger female players to aspire towards. As McNichol says, "Interest in women's soccer has really

increased in the last five years. I think people get more surprised when they actually see a game, and witness that you can control the ball and play with some authority. Most people don't expect women to chest the ball and not be afraid of it."

Considering the fact that there are presently more girls playing organized soccer in Ontario than any other sport, the game will inevitably gain in public profile. Now, the formation of the national team gives athletes like McNichol a bright future and possible international acclaim. McNichol has no intention of soon hanging up her cleats. "I'm 23 now, but as I see it the older you get, the better you get, McNichol states. "As long as you keep fit, the quality of your play improves. I figure I have about another three years at a national level."

It is nothing short of amazing that Canadian women have already vaulted into serious contention at the international level. According to Crandles, "If there was an Olympic sport for women now, I would think that we (Canada) would be as good in World competition as the men are." But when comparing the men and women in relative terms, McNichol points out that "the women are better than the men, as far as it took the men 10 years to become internationally competitive, especially considering that the men have all kinds of opportunity to play soccer at international levels (national, junior, youth, under 16 teams) but the women do not."

In 1987 in Tokyo, Canadian women will find out exactly how well they rank internationally. And as David Bell says, "I would be very surprised if we saw many Shelley McNichols running around in Tokyo." Indeed, we're very fortunate to have the world-class athlete running around here at York.

## Play-off hopes in doubt as flatfooted Yeomen match last year's loss record in three games

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"Most of us have not played together long enough as a team. It takes time to gel, but it looked like it all came together today."

Coach Crandles agreed with Robbins, saying that "this game was completely different (than against U of T). We're starting to understand each other and we had the scoring touch."

Against Queen's, however, York looked to be up to their familiar flat-footedness as the Golden Gaels forced the action early in the game.

Slowly though, the Yeomen became more sharp. Their best scoring chance came in a spectacular set-up from Anthony Daley. Daley was tripped up on the play but still managed to return to his feet and "bicycle" kick (a backward somersault kick) a pass onto the foot of Anthony Robbins who rifled the ball off the inside of the post.

Queen's also had good scoring chances but York's goalie Rafael Torre (Crandles had elected to give Paul Bottos a much needed rest)

made many key saves to keep York in the game. The first half ended scoreless.

In the second half, persistence paid off for Queen's as the team finally scored on York. Queen's, sparked by the goal, continued to put pressure on York and Torre once again had to make some big saves.

York tied the game with their only goal when Daley rushed down the sideline and blasted a shot at the goal which deflected off the diving Queen's netminder and into the goal.

After Anthony Hughes left the game with a popped knee, coach Crandles was forced to make line changes in the backfield. Some of the players were unfamiliar with their new assigned positions and this allowed Queen's the opportunity they needed. Queen's scored two more goals before the game was over, making the final score 3-1.

"The turning point in the game was when Hughes got hurt," Crandles said after the game. "I had to shuffle up the backfield to help with the injuries and I made some bad substitutions. As a result we had players playing defence who were not familiar with the position."

York is still hurting injury-wise as two more players are out with injur-

ies. Norman Tsolakis, a key man on the Yeomen defensive line, is out with an ankle injury and George Katsuras, who scored two goals in York's 5-3 loss to Carleton, is out due to an extended thigh muscle. Both, however, hope to be back in action for next game.

"Looks like we're back to the old drawing board," Crandles said. "Fortunately we have a week to prepare for our next game which is against Laurentian."

At this point in time, the Yeomen have lost as many games as they did all last season. Their record now stands at an unimpressive 1-3. If the Yeomen don't manage to turn things around soon, they could find themselves out of playoff contention.

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