

98's Take the 2009 Golden Stick Trophy

In the midst of their inaugural season, the Chicago Mission 98's and Coach Ryan Taylor finally captured their first tournament championship over the Martin Luther King weekend at the Glacier Ice Arena in Vernon Hills. After four hard fought games, the Golden Stick Trophy was theirs.

The young team began with a well-fought victory vs. the Rochester Americans. The Mission players found themselves down 1-0 at the end of the first period, but **Sean Dhooghe** came out firing with the first goal of the second period on an assist by **Jack Walsh**. Shortly after, **Nicholas McKeeby** scored from the point on an assist from **Quinn Green**. **Michael Cali** added the Mission's third goal from **Brett Crook** and **Michael Altobelli**. The Rochester Americans came back quickly with two goals of their own to tie the score. Late in the third, **Green** scored the eventual game winner, assisted by **Dhooghe** and **Nicky Caprio**. **Adam Scheel** had an amazing third period as he fought off 10 shots to seal the Mission victory, 4-3.

Game Two was also an exciting game. The Mission found themselves pitted against their cross-town rivals, Team Illinois. TI scored in each of the first two periods to take the lead that they never relinquished. At the start of the third, **Jack Walsh** scored for the Mission, assisted by **Michael Zuffante**, but it was too little, too late, as TI scored on an empty netter and got the 3-1 victory.

Game Three proved to be a nail biter vs. the St. Louis Jr. Blues. They had beaten the Mission 3-2 the night before in an exhibition game, so the boys in red and black had something to prove. **Michael Zuffante** opened the scoring on an assist from **Cali** early in the first period. The Jr. Blues answered with a quick goal. Not to be outdone, **Joey Keane** fired from the point shortly thereafter to make the score 2-1. The Blues' responded with a power play goal just two minutes later to tie it again. With 15 seconds left in the first, the Mission was on the penalty kill. **Zuffante** crashed the net and scored a shorty, which would become the game winner, on an assist by **Walsh**. The Mission defensemen (minus the injured **John Pesek**) knew they had to step it up to preserve the lead, and **Sam Sterne**, **Peter Zhong**, **Altobelli**, **Keane**, and **McKeeby** did just that. **Scheel** was spectacular in the net, stoning a penalty shot in the second and facing 14 more blistering shots before the final buzzer sounded. The Mission stunned the Jr. Blues and claimed the victory 3-2.

The Dallas Jr. Stars wanted revenge in Game Four since the Mission had beaten them in an exhibition game 5-3 the day before. Late in the first, **Jack Walsh** scored a power play goal on an assist from **Sterne** and **Zuffante**. Early in the second, Mission scored three bang-bang goals: **Caprio** (unassisted), **Green** (assisted by **Rudi Ying**), and **Ying** (assisted by **Joey Abate**). The Jr. Stars fought back and scored two goals, but **Vinnie Purpura** was solid in the net with a total of 19 saves and **Green** capped off the Mission scoring to make the final score 5-2.

Then the waiting began...TI was facing St. Louis in the game that would determine the tournament championship. Both teams had one loss, so...if TI beat St. Louis, they would be deemed the champs. On the other hand, if St. Louis won, the Mission would be the victors since they beat the Blues in head-to-head competition. The Mission players and fans held their collective breath as the game ensued. St. Louis regrouped and bounced back from their morning defeat to beat TI 4-1. The Mission 98's were the 2009 Golden Stick Tournament Champions!

Congratulations to the Mission 98 players and Coaches Ryan Taylor, Jeff Green and Mark Falconi on a job well done!