

Hockey in the Afghanistan Desert??? How You Can Help Support Our Troops.

Kent, WA 6 August, 2009 – Brenda Mason has an idea and she is hoping the Seattle Thunderbirds and Kent Valley Hockey Association can help her. Brenda's husband Rob Mason, a Washington State Patrol Trooper, was recently deployed to Kandahar Afghanistan with a reserve unit of the U.S. Army. He arrived in Afghanistan the first of July. The Kandahar base is a NATO base, run by the Canadians. In true Canadian style they've built a hockey rink on the base. Obviously ice was too difficult, given the environment, so



they play ball hockey on an outdoor concrete surface rink that looks an awful lot like a standard ice rink. According to Rob Mason; *"The rink is not regulation size. It is the size of a mite league rink, similar in size to the old Burien Ice Chalet."*

According to Rob Mason, Afghanistan is a dangerous place, especially the southern area where Kandahar is located. News media is reporting daily the escalation of violence in the area. Mason said; *"The hockey rink and games provide a good outlet for everyone. There are leagues, with 40 members per team because of the coming and goings of teammates. The league season goes thru September. At other times the field is used for pick-up games. He says they use regular pads, but it is strange to see the goalie in pads, wearing a tee shirt and shorts. Anyone can play in the league or pick-up games."*

In March of 2008 the Stanley Cup and its keeper travelled to Kandahar. Mason said; *"There have been NHL guys that have come over to play in games to boost morale. Everyone shares gear, but they are always in need of sticks."* According to CBC News, the owner of the Ottawa Senators travelled to Kandahar in April 2007 with \$50,000 worth of hockey gear for the Canadian troops. Owner Eugene Melnyk's donation of hockey sticks, pads and jerseys got the ball hockey league off to a great start.

Rob Mason said; *"Goalies wear full pads and players wear plastic shin and knee guards, if they can get them. Gloves are the smaller type gloves. Sticks are wooden with plastic vented blade or regular ice hockey blades."* According to Mason; *"Most players prefer the regular wooden ice hockey stick blades, because dirt accumulates in the plastic vented blades. Goalies use regular ice hockey sticks. The goal post is the same as ice hockey, no trapezoid. Games have regular referees wearing striped shirts. Score is kept on a board that someone physically changes. Games are played in two twenty minute periods. Hockey games are played year around, but broken up into different seasons. Each team is a different nation. The other night we watched Slovenia and Albania play."* Mason says the games are intense and fun. *"The games provide a great diversion in a hostile place;"* he said.

Back to Brenda Mason's idea: Brenda proposes we show our support for our troops stationed at Kandahar by donating and collecting hockey sticks for the Kandahar hockey teams. *"Do you think we can come up with a way to gather up a box of hockey sticks, new or used, to send over to Kandahar? Rob will make sure to get them to the guys that organize the rink activity."* Mason says she will handle the shipping or possibly coordinate shipping through the military.

How to donate a hockey stick: Donated hockey sticks can be delivered to the main office at Kent Valley Ice Centre to the attention of – **Rob Mason Hockey Stick Project.** The

hockey sticks can be new or used, but must be in good condition. They should be adult sized sticks. Wooden hockey stick blades will also be accepted as well as blade tape.

For the record, Brenda Mason is a member of the Seattle Thunderbirds Off-Ice Officials team and a long-time hockey fan. Her husband Rob is an alternate member of the Off-Ice Officials team. During the Thunderbird's hockey season Brenda serves as scorekeeper, spotter and on-line scorekeeper. Rob fills in from time to time as a spotter, penalty box operator or goal judge.

If you have any questions or desire further information regarding this project, please contact Lew Sellers.

See you at the rink! And, bring a hockey stick for the troops!

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