

Giovanni Caboto Rink Diaries: Excerpts from the 08/09 Season

Friday December 27, 2008

Foggy and mild today, with a few short showers. At 4.00 pm the rink is open but full of water. It's hard to get there -- the stairs are still not shoveled and neither is the ramp. There is a sign taped to the door, with faint writing on it, saying to go around, presumably because the stairs are unshoveled. But in order to see the sign you have to be so close that you'd have gone down the stairs already.

So to get in, you have to squeeze by the construction vehicles and across the slippery snow and come in the side door. Once in, the rink ice is hard and smooth underneath the layer of water. No skaters. Inside there are three people -- looks like three staff. One of them is the zamboni operator. He says there's no use running the zamboni on the ice, since the ice is melting. When told that the ice is fine at Rennie and Dufferin, with the water scraped off, he says that is impossible.

I don't even ask about the stairs. These three men have all the time they need to clean the snow and ice off the stairs, since there is no intention to clean the water off the rink ice. The mild weather makes it possible to do a good job on the stairs. But the zamboni operator already explained last week that he has no intention of removing the snow, and the supervisor has not replied to my e-mail question about it.



Unshoveled stairs and ramp



The locked front door, empty entrance, unlabelled staff door

January 1, 2009

The city holiday schedule says that this rink is open but unsupervised. The steps and ramp are unshoveled and the front door is locked as before, but there's a new, more colourful hand-lettered sign saying that the rink must be accessed "by the gate" instead of the door. A few skaters try the door and then look around to where the gate might be. The parked St.Clair Right-of-Way construction trailers are still blocking the gate, but it's possible to slip between the vehicles and find the way in.

Once inside the fence, it's evident that there must be some rink supervision somewhere, since the ice appears to be freshly resurfaced and the speaker attached to the light standard has music playing. There are a few pleasure-skaters, and another few shinny hockey players. More are changing into their skates. No sign of the zamboni driver. His (unlabelled) door is shut and the front desk, very nicely located by the locked front door, is empty. So are the various change rooms, one of which is blocked off by a bench. But some washrooms are open, and they're clean.

January 14, 2009

It's minus 15 at noon and there are not many people on the ice on this cold day. As usual, it's hard to get in, since the front stairs continue to be unshoveled and so a rink user must squeeze in between construction trailers and a portable toilet. Once in, I was impressed to see some guys playing shinny despite the cold. I took a picture, and then another one.



Finding the path between the construction trailers

One of the players skated over and shouted at me: "what are you doing? why are you taking a picture?" I explained that I wanted to put up a photo showing that Canadian shinny players are tough enough to play shinny in the extreme cold. But he cut me off, angrily pointing to the metal City Policy sign with all the rink rules -- "can't you read? You're not supposed to take pictures!"

Then I recognized him as a rink guard. "You work here? You're not supposed to be playing hockey on your shift!" He said he could play hockey if he wanted. I told him he was very rude. That was the end of it.



The entryway to the rink

Wallace Rink Diaries: Excerpts 08/09 Season

Saturday December 6, 2008

The ice is a bit rough in places (looks like only one flood with a zamboni), and thin, but there's no cement. It's full of kids. As usual the nailed-up players' boxes are where all the kids prefer to sit -- it's tricky because their legs are all dangling and kids run into them during the shinny games. The approach to the rink from the parking lot is very trashy, same as last year, and there trash has blown up against the chain link fence and got stuck there. It's hard to tell when it was last picked up.



Players' boxes are nailed shut

Sunday December 7, 2008

It was cold today, so there were not as many skaters. Also it snowed last evening, and no plough or zamboni came until mid-afternoon today. Staff and skaters managed to clear off most of the pleasure-skating side with their single rink shovel, but the hockey side took much longer and



Shinny hockey players

staff still weren't finished by the time the zamboni came. One rink user was very upset that staff wouldn't allow hockey on the pleasure-skating side. When the flying squad finally got there, they made all the skaters clear both rinks and go inside the rink house for half an hour. This was apparently because the zamboni had to cross the pleasure-skating pad several times to get to the water source, when it was clearing off the hockey ice (all that snow was gumming up the zamboni augur, so it needed more water than usual). The zamboni staff didn't want to be held up by waiting for another 5 minutes, for the rink staff to clear the pleasure-skating ice, each time the zamboni had to go for more water. So the skaters were held up for half an hour instead.

The back story is that the rink renovation of two years ago was not designed with ice maintenance in mind. So there is no zamboni garage, no natural gas outlet, and no ready water access. Sad and a bit unbelievable, but true.

Thursday January 1, 2009

A fine day, cold but clear, with a LOT of skaters, everyone in a good mood and "Happy New Year"-ing each other. Ice maintenance: zamboni crew were only scheduled for Etobicoke on New Year's Day. So at Wallace Rink there was manual ice maintenance only (snowshovels and green ice scrapers) done by rec staff and skaters: 11am, 6:30pm.

Friday January 2, 2009

Ice maintenance: 11am manual scrape by rink users, 1:50pm flying squad, 5:30pm manual scrape by rink users, 6:30pm flying squad.

Tuesday January 6, 2009

There were lots of people on this rink in late afternoon-evening.

Wallace Community Centre has a large and lively after-school program, and they come to skate and play shinny hockey more often now that such good skate rentals are available. Later on the families arrive, and many shinny-playing youth.



"Pond" side

A couple of trouble-maker youth have been banned from the rink, and one tried to return tonight. These kids are used to the opportunities that come from inconsistency, and they are taken aback when they find out that "banned" really means they can't come to skate unless they have an interview with the supervisor. To get back in, they have to agree to a schedule of community hours where they do some actual work, alongside the staff, and show their willingness to stop making trouble.

Some do it, and act better when they have the freedom of the rinks again. Some have to sit out a year until they get more mature -- and they return a year later saying "I'm better now, Miss" -- and they are.

Some just keep getting into worse trouble elsewhere. But not so many.



How not to do ice maintenance -- some work and some chat