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# Olympian returns to Concord for Black Ice Pond Hockey weekend

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ELIZABETH FRANTZ / Concord Monitor

## Happy hockey player

Olympic gold medal winner and Concord native Tara Mounsey plays with team Babes of Glory during the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championships at White Park in Concord on Friday.



Posted Sunday, January 25, 2015 8:00 am

By RAY DUCKLER Concord Monitor

Her name wasn't on the back of her jersey during the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship on Friday at White Park in Concord. Neither was the No. 2 she wore during two Olympics, in 1998 and four years later.

But the Angry Pirates, all six players, recognized Tara Mounsey.

Players surrounded her for a photo shoot after their game against Mounsey's team, the Babes of Glory, at the fifth annual outdoor hockey tournament with some 100 teams.

One of the Pirates, Sara Sankowich of Exeter, said she still has the VHS tape of the gold medal hockey game from the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan, and that's the lone reason she keeps her VCR.

And the eyes of Sankowich's teammate, Dana Stark of Concord, grew to the size of hockey pucks when asked why meeting Mounsey meant so much.

"Because she's amazing," Stark said. "She's like my mentor. I've looked up to her since I was a little kid. She went to the high school I graduated from. She's just, I've known her since I was a little kid."

Not really. In fact, their paths crossed for the first time during this event. But to this 20-year-old, Mounsey feels like a lifelong coach, teacher, role model, friend, goddess, you name it.

That's what happens when you're part of the first-ever women's Olympic hockey competition, you win the first gold medal ever awarded, you graduate from any Ivy League school, you sign your name on everything and anything that anyone hands you, and you never stop smiling while doing it.

"Through my career, I wanted to be a good role model for the kids," Mounsey said. "My parents instilled that in me. I felt that was very important, and because of the Olympics, I'm still friendly with families that have kids going into college now."

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Has it really been 20 years since Mounsey turned the high school hockey community upside down by skating on the Concord High boys' team and being named the best player in the state?

And has it really been 17 years since Mounsey won Olympic gold in Nagano, Japan, and 13 years since she captured silver in Salt Lake City?

Mounsey is young enough to skate with crisp, fluent strides, as she's showing this weekend. But she's also old enough to pounce, in a good natured manner, if you wrongly add a year to her life.

"37?" I asked.

"I'm not 37," she said. "I'm 36. Let's not add to that yet."

Mounsey is married, raising two children and working as a nurse practitioner in Boston. She'd never played in the Black Ice Championship before because life got in the way, as sometimes happens.

"I would have played in it at its inception, but I was pregnant and then I had two little kids, and it just didn't work out for the past few years," Mounsey said. "But I've always been interested in adding a team or being part of a team, and the slots fill up quickly, so I made the cut this year."

So did Stephanie Acres, a Babes of Glory teammate and another Concord girl who helped pave the way for girls' hockey in the state. And somewhere else at White Park, on another of the eight small rinks, Tasha Fine, yet another area pioneer, skated in a game, too.

"It was always important to us to help the sport, and we trained hard for it," Acres said.

In fact, Concord became a hotbed for girls' hockey, and Mounsey became the face of the movement, back in the mid-1990s. She blew by boys on the youth level and again at Concord High, and when she was done doing that, she dominated against women in college.

By time she earned a spot on the U.S. Olympic Team, Mounsey had become a celebrity around here, and her status only grew from there.

Her father, Mike Mounsey, pushed her hard to be great, something he later admitted to regretting. But Mike can't be too hard on himself, because he and his wife, Sue, helped shape this trailblazer, who was forever aware of the importance of her mission.

On Oct. 18, 1997, at Everett Arena, before the Nagano Games, Team USA played an exhibition, a tuneup for the Olympics. After the game and again four months later, at the airport in Manchester following the Nagano Games, little kids — boys as well as girls, wearing Mounsey No. 2 jerseys, their faces painted red, white and blue — wanted an autograph and a little inspiration.

Stark was too young to remember the '98 games, but four years later, at age 7, Mounsey had become bigger than life to her, especially since they shared the same hometown. She remembers the Salt Lake City Games quite well.

"I played hockey when I was 7, and I knew of her ever since, and I always wanted to be like her and skate like her, be just like her," Stark said, her words pouring out like a 3-on-1 break. "She's awesome."

Mounsey still skates, in a pickup league in Milton, Mass., with firefighters and cops, all male.

Like the old days.

"That's my roots," Mounsey said. "I started with the guys, and now I'm back playing with guys. I feel great; I'm fit."

She's also recognizable. Sankowich played high school hockey in New Jersey, but she knew all about Mounsey back in 1998, when she was 19. She got her autograph after an exhibition in Boston.

And she got her picture taken with Mounsey on Friday. All her teammates did.

"I asked her if it was a faux pas to get an autograph before the game," Sankowich said.

It was not, of course, and never has been.

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