

How Fran Rider helped women's hockey 'achieve the impossible'

Rink named after hockey legend in Mississauga

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The relegation game at the 2000 Women's World Hockey Championships may not carry much significance these days, but Fran Rider remembers it to this day.

Germany defeated Japan 3-2 to earn the right to play in the next world championship.

Rider called it one of the best relegation games in the history of the tournament and it's relevant to her now because it took place at Iceland Arena in Mississauga on the same rink that was dedicated in Rider's honour on Oct. 7.

"Iceland was a big part of that event and it was packed for that relegation game, which made a difference," recalls Rider, who's been recognized on several occasions for her relentless efforts to foster the game of women's hockey around the world.

Monikers like pioneer and trailblazer have been used to describe the 66-year-old, who has proudly called Mississauga her home for decades.

She's clearly deserving of those labels because of her historical impact in

leading the push for the creation of the Women's World Hockey Championships and the game's inclusion in the Winter Olympics beginning in 1998.

Rider says it's special to have so many honours bestowed upon her - including becoming the first woman to be inducted into the International Ice Hockey Federation Hall of Fame as a builder - but admits she has always tried to "keep (her) name out of things."

On that note, it's strange for her to see her name over the doors leading into Iceland rink 1. She credits the contributions of countless colleagues, volunteers and administrators who have helped her "achieve the impossible," by getting women's hockey into the Olympics.

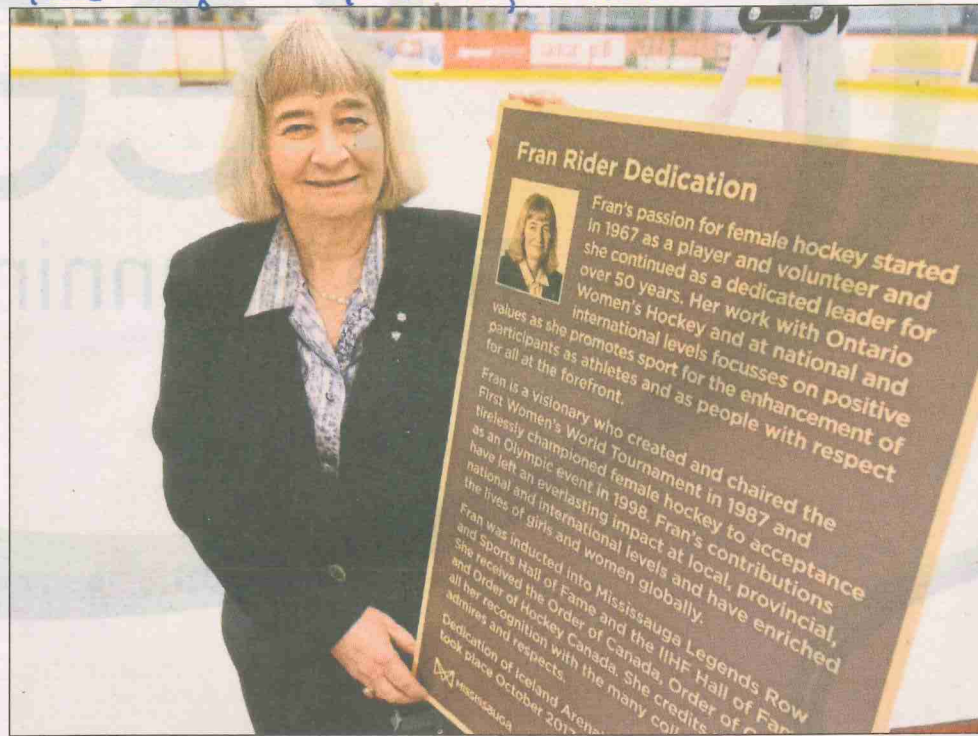
"We did it together because people from (all over) the world came together for a common goal and common vision," she said.

"It was a positive vision and it was good for everybody ... If only the world could come together in that type of forum, we'd be able to solve a lot of the world's problems."

Rider's love of hockey and desire to push for opportunities for women in the sport go back far before the 1998, when women's hockey made its Olympic debut in Nagano, Japan.

She grew up a big Toronto Maple Leafs fan, and

Peel Blog. RIDER, Fran



Rob Beintema/Metroland

On Oct. 7, Iceland rink 1 was dedicated in honour of Fran Rider, honouring her tireless efforts to promote women's hockey in Mississauga, Canada and around the world for more than 50 years.

in 1967, the last year they won the Stanley Cup, she happened to find a Toronto Telegram article advertising a women's hockey tournament.

She signed up to play - as well as volunteer as a scorekeeper when she wasn't playing - and it ignited a lifelong passion.

"The first thing I noticed was I didn't even know how to put on the equipment, but the players very much wanted everyone to play," she said with a laugh.

Rider recalled the team she was on being a motley crew of players, ranging in age from nine to 44 because it was still so rare to see women playing ice hockey during that time.

She explained how it was very difficult for women to get both credibility and ice time at reasonable times during that time.

Years later when she began pushing for women's hockey in the Olympics, she was told many times to stop because it would never happen, but she never

gave up her pursuit.

"Even the first year I played, some of the players in the women's game were incredibly good and talented," she said. "There was no reason in my mind that it shouldn't be played at the world and Olympic level."

Along the way, former Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion, an avid hockey enthusiast and advocate in her own right, became friends with Rider and still to this day encourages her to keep pushing in her efforts to grow the women's

game.

Before women's hockey could be accepted in the Olympics, it had to have a recognized world championship tournament. That took many attempts from Rider and her colleagues before it was finally granted by the International Ice Hockey Federation in time for the first official world championship in 1990.

At the highest level, the women's game still continues to be scrutinized because it's always Canada and the United States playing for gold at the world championships, but Rider believes the game is making headway in other parts of the world, including China, which has always fielded a good second-tier team at the Olympics and world championships.

It's been a slow climb when it comes to women's professional hockey, but the game is making headway in North America.

Rider didn't have female players to look up to as a child, but is proud to say youngsters these days have plenty of women's athletes to look up to, like Marie-Philip Poulin, Shannon Szabados and Rebecca Johnston, just to name a few.

She feels as though they're role models to younger children since they're so dedicating of their time and always willing to sign an autograph or go out of their way to grow the women's game.