

# Team effort led Alaska Hockey team to victory

By BILL HESS

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It is a bit surprising to meet Mel Oyoumick, Gordy Kito and Boyd Sutton in the box after their hockey victory over the Northwest Territories.

Out on the ice, fully dressed in all their pads, their bulky protective gloves, and their brain-saving helmets, they look like giants — big men.

Now one can see the smoothness of youth still on their faces, and while they are not "shrinks," they also are not monsters.

Sixteen-year-old Oyoumick stands five-foot eight and weighs 157 pounds. Kito measures 5-5 at 135 pounds, about right for a 15-year-old.

Sutton, also 15, has 132 pounds packed into his five-foot, four-inch frame. All are ecstatic over their most recent victory in the Arctic Winter Games.

"When they came out, they kind of felt too confident," Oyoumick says of their Canadian competitors.

"They thought they were going to blow us off the ice."

"We skated as a team," Kito tells why he believes the Alaskans won. "We didn't go out trying to kill people. We're littler than they are, but we're quicker skaters. We just spread out, passed the puck, and let them run around trying to hit us!"

Oyoumick and Kito are the only Alaska Natives on this year's midget hockey team. Sutton is the team captain. All are from Anchorage. "We didn't play their kind of hockey," Oyoumick adds.

"They tried to hit us and intimidate us. Those Canadians can get rough. I got a cut right here," he motions behind his right ear. Obviously, intimidation of the Alaskans did not work.

"We just skated around them," Sutton explains. "You can't hit what you can't catch!"

This doesn't mean there was no contact in the contest. At

times, tangled masses of Alaskans and Canadians slammed into the clear plastic barrier protecting spectators from flying pucks and tumbling players with such booming force as to frighten the observer unaccustomed to hockey.

There were frequent collisions on the ice, sending both Alaskans and Canadians face first into the playing surface.

Nor was Alaska totally free from penalties, and the five they did receive were laid on the aggressive Kito.

There also were quick turns, rapid maneuvers, and fast, accurate passing as the Alaskans pursued their opponents for four goals while only giving up one.

Both Kito and Sutton scored one goal apiece, and assisted on two others. Oyoumick plays defense, and while being unable to take credit for any Alaskan points, he can take credit for several points the Canadians didn't receive.

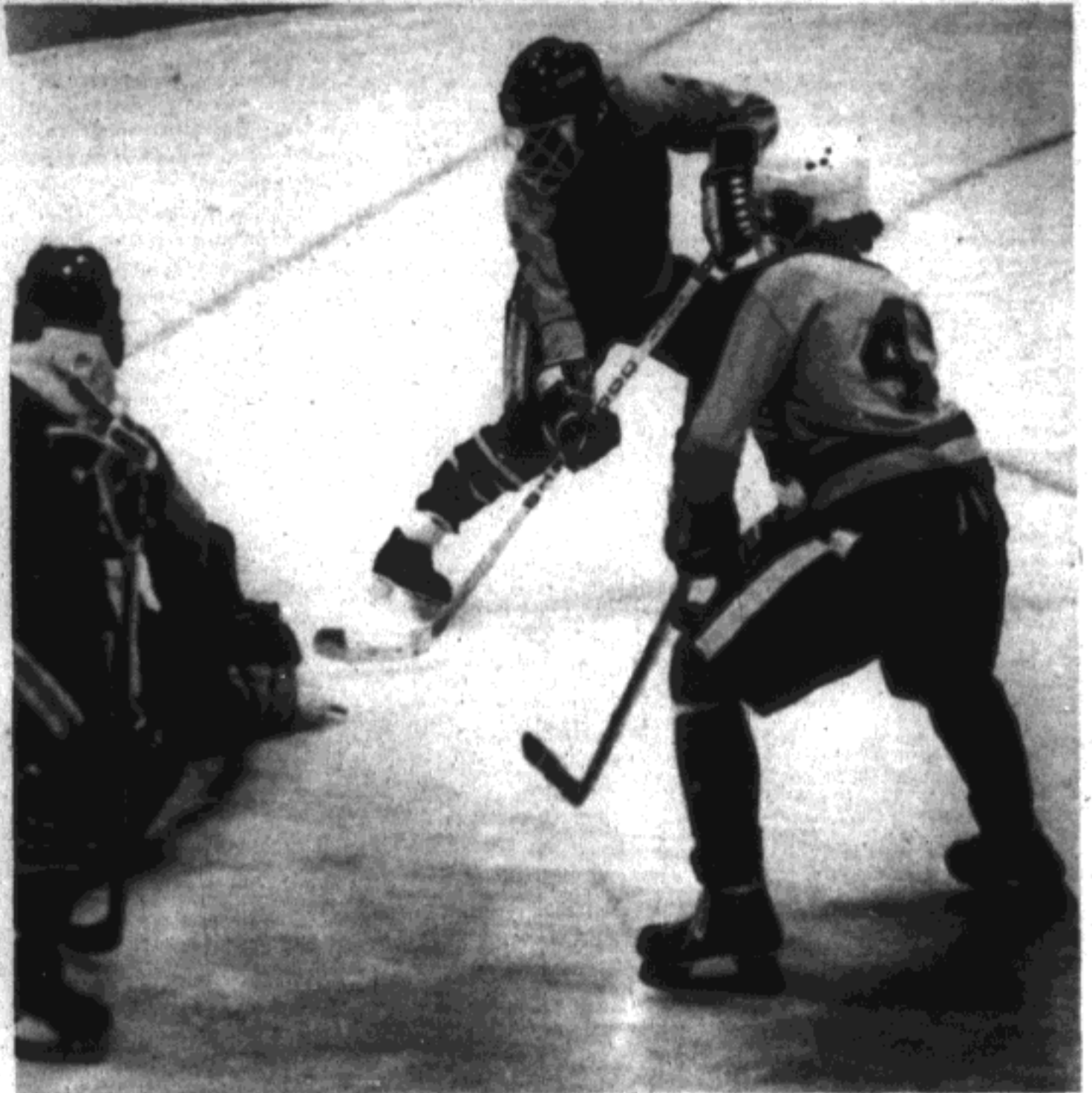
All three agree that the team's goalie, Kyle Freeman, also deserves much credit for the victory. Freeman made 40 saves, compared to 31 for the goalie of the Northwest Territories.

Although hockey always will be a rough, hardhitting sport, all three athletes agree that brains are playing more and more important roles in the game.

"It used to be that they'd send some guy out to kill somebody," Sutton recalls the days when he was still a little guy. "If a guy was a fast skater, or a good shot, they were out to get him, to hurt him. Now you have to be able to anticipate what's coming up. If you can't anticipate, you're lost in today's hockey."

"Now you can't send one guy out, it's more of a team effort," adds Oyoumick.

"A team has to have more guys that can pass and score." They all agree that hockey is a better sport this way. "It's more fun," Sutton explains. "You skate more than you get



Gordie Kito scores a goal for Alaska during competition against the Northwest Territories at the Arctic Winter Games. Although they downed Northwest 4-1, Alaska lost its final game against the Yukon, 11-2.

hurt."

A mother and father seeing their young son get slammed into the wall might fear for his safety, but all the boys claim their parents enjoy having them participate, and are strong supporters of their effort.

Sam Kito, Gordy's father, who attended as a spectator, seems to back up the boy's position. "I'd worry more if he were playing football," he says later, after his son had retired to the locker room.

Although people sometimes think of hockey as a brawling game, these players contend that athletes must have

grace, balance, and skill on skates if he is to be successful.

"Figure skaters and hockey players are about equally skilled," Kito claims. "Figure skating does not have the quick turns that hockey does but it is a smooth sport. It is fun to watch."

"Yea, especially the girls!" Sutton pops in.

"That's why you watch," Oyoumick chides.

All three of these young athletes took up hockey at very young ages, playing their first games when they were only six and seven years old. All hope to play more in the

future; not only in high school, but in college and in league sports.

"I've got to get through school," Kito notes, "and I hope to go to college, and a good education comes first."

"Yea," Oyoumick agrees. "It's education before sports. You need good educational training. You can't play hockey all your life."

Sutton agrees, but points out that hockey can help an athlete get an education. "Hockey can get you places," he explains. "Like for college, it can get you a scholarship, and then you will not have to pay for all those classes."



Kito, Oyoumick and Sutton (left to right), players on the 1982 hockey team which represented Alaska in the midget division of the Arctic Winter Games.