

# Daring, skill and don't forget the ice

**I**F YOU like the feeling of hurtling across wet cement in a pair of sneakers then broomball could just be for you.

Broomball is essentially field hockey on ice. Now before you all say "isn't that ice hockey?" there are a couple of very important differences.

Broomball players use a large rubber ball rather than a puck, have paddle-shaped sticks, and most importantly wear rubber-soled shoes rather than the usual skates.

And that, according to ACT Broomball Association president Peter Marshall, is the sport's attraction.

"The shoes on the ice surface create a playing environment which is fairly unique," Marshall said. "You are trying to compete with the environmental conditions as well as the other team and the normal trouble you have trying to control balls and bats. The ice is that added element of excitement."

Broomball began in Canada at the turn of the century but has only been played in Australia for 15 years.

**DI LLOYD** has tied on her shoes and hit the ice — for broomball.

The obvious question is, why would someone devise a sport on ice but throw away the skates?

Marshall said there were several theories. One is that a group of Canadian streetcar sweepers began hitting a ball between railway tracks for exercise and it developed from there. Another is that a group of ice hockey players developed it to keep fit during the summer and the third is that it originated with school children playing soccer on the ice.

No matter where it came from, it has steadily expanded to become the second most popular team ice sport in Canada behind ice hockey.

But just like our own Australian football it has struggled to take hold anywhere else.

Canberra was the first Australian city to give the sport a try in 1981 but Marshall said that before 1990, when a formal association was formed, it had a fairly checkered past.

In the early years it became known more for its violent aspects than as a sport.

## CRICKET TOO TAME?

If cricket, softball and golf are just too tame for you, check out the first of our weekly features on most unusual sports. This week we take a look at broomball. Next week, underwater hockey will be featured.

"It became a bit of a blood-letting, frustration-letting event and that is the way people treated it," Marshall said.

"They just went all in with absolutely no thought for preservation of body or equipment and people were being seriously hurt and it drove a lot of people away from the sport."

Since 1990 a mixed league has been established in Canberra, with non-contact rules and compulsory protective gear.

Marshall said the focus of the sport now was gender equity and

creating a friendly, social atmosphere.

Broomball is a sport which relies on word of mouth to boost its player numbers.

That is how Marshall became involved and is also how ACT development officer Jodie Brandon caught the broomball bug.

Brandon says it is a sport that you either love it or hate after your first match and if it is the former, you will be hooked for life.

She said anyone could play the sport because while balance, speed and basic stick skills were important, they could be easily picked up on the ice.

There are two competitions in Canberra every year, one in the summer and one in the winter.

But Brandon said those who played in winter were the real "die-hard" fans because it was so difficult to get ice time.

She said games could not start before 9pm on a Sunday and were often still going well beyond midnight.

Marshall sees a lack of ice time

as a major stumbling block to the development of the sport in the ACT.

"It is an issue that is not only hampering our progress but is getting to the point where it is almost killing the sport, just because we can get suitable ice time.

"We manage to have a big recruitment program every summer competition which is our largest season because of the availability of the ice time because there is not ice hockey being played but we lose all of those people over the winter."

Broomball is also beginning to take hold in Townsville, Bendigo and South Australia and Marshall and Brandon have plans to form competitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Teams from Canada and America are expected to come to Canberra next year as part of their preparation for the 1996 world championships and Marshall said there were tentative plans to turn those games into an international competition.

But he said that would all depend on getting sufficient ice time.



**WILD THING:** What is played on ice but without ice skates, with a ball but no bat and using brooms with no leaves in sight?

Picture: GARY SCHAFER