



1977-78 Women's Field Hockey Team (The Belles)

Women's sports at Saint Mary's was still in the developmental stages, very much a work in progress when the 1977-78 Women's Field Hockey team, The Belles, gave the program a huge kick-start to proper recognition by winning the AUAA championship in somewhat dramatic fashion over arch rival Dalhousie with a late penalty shot goal. The Belles were only in their fourth year of play and women's sports were still struggling for respect and recognition in an era almost totally dominated by Huskies men's teams in the higher profile divisions. The Belles' case for greater attention and support was carried largely by their coach, Kathy Mullane, an effective voice in the corridor of decision-makers, most notably Athletic Director Bob Hayes who had long recognized the value of attracting more female student-athletes with attractive, successful women's teams in a variety of divisions. Hayes and Mullane shared similar views on the development process and it received a major boost with The Belles rapid ascent to the upper echelons of power in the 77-78 Season.

The Belles shot out of the starting gate that season, holding first place in their division until a loss in the final game of the year to Dalhousie, the defending AUAA and national champions. Undaunted, the Saint Mary's women shook off their disappointment and were firing on all cylinders when the playoffs began, knocking off the University of New Brunswick Red Sticks, then exacting sweet revenge on Dalhousie by winning the AUAA championship with a penalty shot late in the game. The team went on to the National finals at McGill, finishing a highly respectable third among the top teams. Debbie Woodford, who served as Athletic Department secretary and Sports Information Director from 1972 to 1987 before moving to Toronto, remembers that season well.

"Coach Kathy Mullane recruited and crafted a team that boasted a three-year member of the Canadian team, Joan Selig, who led the league in scoring that season, rookie goalie Sherry Conrad, who became recognized as 'Zero Lady' for achieving nine shutouts in 12 games, and other first year players Monica MacKenzie, Cindy Norton, Dianne Chaisson, Judy Power and Martha Hayes; a roster balanced by veterans Irene MacPhee, Nancy Collins, Wanda Williams, Darlene Mossman, Kathy Ells, Anne Murphy, Susan Kober and Vivian Mancini, along with team manager Bonnie Thurber. This was a team that meant business from the opening whistle, a young squad that grew and learned from each other. With each practice and each game the team became more confident that Saint Mary's could capture a championship as they melded and became a strong, cohesive unit in a very brief time span."

A measure of the character of this team is found in the manner the players quickly regained their poise and purpose after the disappointing loss to Dalhousie in the final game of the season, the way the team regrouped, went on to the AUAA title and played so well in the nationals against long odds. Facing adverse field conditions and tough oppositions at McGill, The Belles nonetheless impressed, beating McGill 3-0, tied University of Toronto 1-1, then defeated University of British Columbia 2-1 before losing to the University of Manitoba by one goal after two Darlene Mossman goals were called back on a questionable rule that was eliminated the following season. Members of the team went on to successful careers in business, education and sports, including teachers, nurses and accountants, continuing to give back to their sport and remaining active in alumni affairs.

The 1977-78 Field Hockey Championship team The Belles began the culture change and made an immense contribution to the evolution of women's sports at Saint Mary's under the inspired leadership and direction of Coach Kathy Mullane, the unofficial "First Lady of Sports" at Saint Mary's. A most worthy group inducted into the Hall of Fame.