

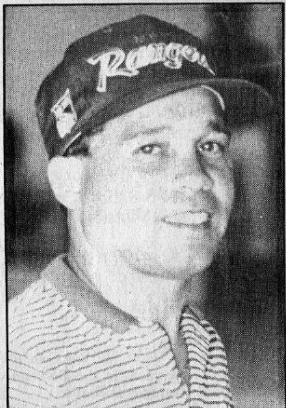
□ LEAGUE PLAY:
Under Blue Gomez's guidance, the Tri-City In-Line Hockey League is perhaps the hottest youth sport with more than 250 youngsters registered for the fall season.

By BRAD HOLLINGSWORTH
The Vista Press Staff

Instead of pews and hymn books, Blue Gomez's ministry uses sticks, skates and gloves.

Gomez is the commissioner for the Tri-City In-Line Hockey League, which has become the fastest growing youth sport in the country and he believes this is a vehicle to reach youngsters of all ages.

"I truly believe hockey is my ministry," said the 38-year-old Gomez. "This is a new sport



Blue Gomez

headquartered in Miami, said there are 2.1 million participants in North America and Canada in 2,500 leagues. Balog, who works at the regional office in Newport Beach, said in that office's first six months 15,000 players and 155 league have been established.

While the sport has grown tremendously across the country, it had spartan beginnings in Vista. Gomez says four kids in his neighborhood playing around in the street, who were playing with a glow-in-the-dark puck. He bought nets and equipment for the group, who named themselves the Shadowridge Renegades and bounded around to local parks.

After receiving flak from park officials, Gomez made a few phone calls and the Tri-City League was born with a different attitude.

"We wanted to do something the other leagues weren't," Gomez said. "Youth sports had become too stressful for kids and parents who were living their sports' lives through their kids. I was really disappointed with Southern California

Gomez's no-nonsense attitude comes from his New York City roots. He grew up in Manhattan's Lower East Side

and put on his first pair of skates at age 4 and played in his first league as an 8-year-old.

Working his way through the Greater New York Hockey League, Metropolitan Junior

Hockey Association and the New York Rangers Junior Teams, Gomez, who was a

goalkeeper, left hockey in 1970 to pursue a career in consumer electronic sales.

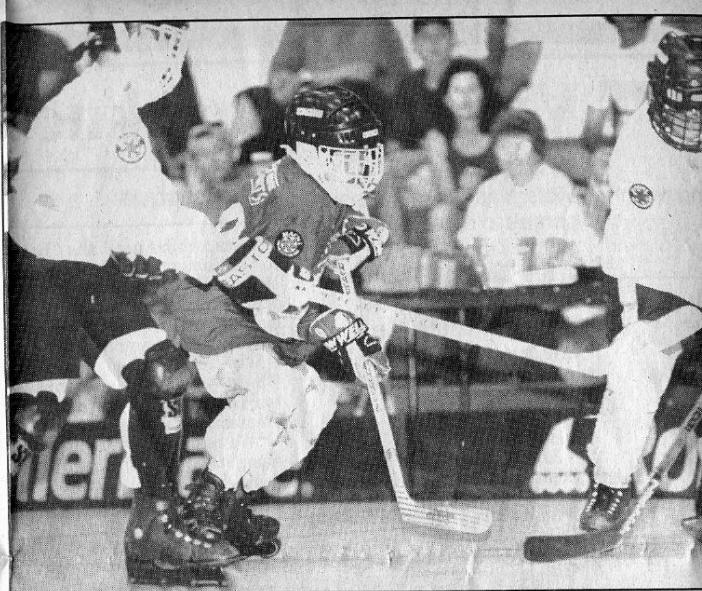
That brought Gomez to California, where he now spends more time battling city

officials than does instructing youngsters on the finer points of the game.

"I spend about 80 percent of my time doing this," Gomez said. "I have to work with the cities and politicians who seem

to have their hands in certain sports and that is a method for them to get votes.

"I work best in controversy and it's just like a goalkeeper because you have to be very unorthodox and things just seem to come out right."



Currently, there are 18 teams and more than 170 youngsters participating in the league.

I've seen kids from broken homes with divorced parents who live two or three counties away come to a game on a Saturday, sit next to each other and cheer!

— Blue Gomez

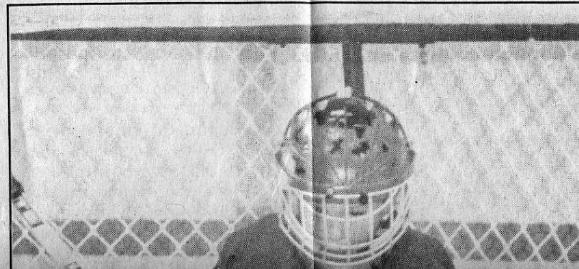
In-Line Hockey

around here and I want to introduce the fundamentals and develop kids. These are going to be our future leaders and all they have to believe in are fallen heroes and they don't know what to do.

"This sport has discipline that they can use later in life. I see where bad behaviors leave the parents and the kids stressed out. I want to change that and I want the kids to have fun.

"I've seen kids from broken homes with divorced parents who live two or three counties away come to a game on a Saturday, sit next to each other and cheer. That's what keeps me going."

The league, which started two years with 70 players, has expanded to 170 players on 18



Registration for fall

The Vista Press

The Tri-City In-Line Hockey League will be held pre-registration for its current players from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 13 at the Boys and Girls Club of Vista.

Boys and girls ages 7-17 are eligible for the league and must be age 7 by Sept. 3 and less than 18 by the same date. A current report card must be submitted with a grade-point average of 2.0 and applies to middle school and high school players only.

An open registration is being held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 20 at the Boys and Girls Club, 410 W. California Ave. The fee for all players is \$85.

All players are required to have in-line skates with no exposed bolts, hockey stick (no

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