Kenyon Gregory

Professor Amey

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**Bringing the love of Hockey to Virginia Tech**

What started as an idea for Lily Espino and Samantha Grey turned into a women’s ice hockey team at Virginia Tech.

“We just wanted an opportunity to play the game that we love and share it with others who were interested,” Espino said.

Founded in October 2020, the Virginia Tech Women’s Ice Hockey team started off as a grassroots program in Roanoke and joined the newly formed, Women’s Atlantic Coast Collegiate Hockey League (WACCHL) which started in 2021.

The team consisted of players who had played hockey before and some who were new to the game.

“The majority of our team consisted of girls who did not play hockey before,” Grey said. “It was a challenge teaching them the rules of the game, how to dress out and how to skate, but everybody was patient with each other and willing to take on the challenge.”

The team plays its games at the Berglund Center in Roanoke.

The team could only play NC State, the only other team in the conference at the time, but facing the Wolfpack lit a fire under this young squad.

“We started having six am practices and off the ice workouts that prepared us to play NC State in the first WACCHL championship game.” Espino said.

By this time, the girls who were new at hockey gained some confidence and experience by playing the same team repeatedly. However, what was most nerve-wracking for Liz Smith and Olivia Lee was the opportunity to become the first at something.

“I had never been in a position before to win a championship,” Smith said. “I had butterflies in my stomach the whole day.”

Lee did not want to let her team down because of all the hard work that everybody had put into the season.

“I just felt that though a lot of people get the chance to be the first at something and when given this opportunity, I could not take it for granted and had to give it my all,” Lee said.

In the championship game, the Hokies defeated the Wolfpack 9-7. They were led by Lily Harp and Brenna Neuman who both scored 3 goals, Espino who scored 2 goals and Kat Fichera with one goal. Liz Smith was in goal for the Hokies.

After winning the championship, the Hokies held the cup up high and were proud to bring it back to Blacksburg.

“I am just so proud of this team, and I hope that this is the start of something special here at Virginia Tech,” Espino said.

The team is also involved in the local hockey community and is excited to help the growth of youth hockey, especially for women. The team works with the Lady Dawgs, a youth hockey program for women founded the same year that the Ice Hockey at Virginia Tech was founded.

In the one-and-a-half years that the WACCHL was founded, the conference has expanded from two teams to eight team’s including, High Point, George Washington, Tampa University, Virginia, Georgetown, and West Virginia. The conference has announced that it’s looking for more teams as the game of women’s hockey continues to be grow in popularity.

For the women’s team at Virginia Tech, it only hopes that the love of the game continues to grow and evolve and one day they hope that their biggest dream comes true.

“We hope that one day that we can get Hokie Nation to sell out the Berglund Center and cheer us on in the same capacity that they do for other sports,” Espino said.