

Lions' good omens for next campaign

IT was a season full of highs and lows for the Lea Bridge Road based Lee Valley Lions.

The team improved on the previous season, finishing an extra place higher in the English National League Ice Hockey table and scored particularly notable victories over high flying Basingstoke Buffalo and Bracknell Hornets.

Lions won seven of their games and lost 11, whereas the previous season they had been victorious in five, but lost 15 of their matches. They also had two draws.

It was also Sue Ranby's first season

Assistant manager Julianne Bonner looks back at the recently completed campaign

as manager of the club, taking over the reins from Deryk Beeson, whose son Scott finished the Lions' top goal-scorer for the third year running.

Sue Ranby commented: "I think we have improved as a team rather than as individuals. Next season I believe we will be a lot stronger and I'm hopeful we should end up in the top three."

Lions retained the services of several key members of the squad from 2006-07

including top scorer Beeson, classy defenceman Romanos Fedotovas, while the departure of net-minder Stefan Nubert, allowed George Alley to step up and fill the role.

He was joined by his talented younger brother Nick, just 17, who had previously seen service with neighbouring Haringey Greyhounds.

Another ex-Greyhounds teenager Nick Breigoos also linked up with the Lions' camp and both showed their abilities from the start, scoring on their debuts.

Certainly there were matches when the team showed they were a force to be reckoned with and coach Sergei Smolenko showed his abilities in running the eventual league winners Invicta Dynamos close in an early season game, that finished 5-3.

In November, Lions turned around a previous 16-6 loss to Basingstoke into an inspiring 4-3 away victory and then went on to beat Bracknell 7-5 in January, despite the opposition being top of the league at that time.

New Yorker Scott Pollak joined the Lions' ranks as captain and his enthusiasm and positive attitude impressed throughout the remainder of the season.

"We began to show progress after some set-backs. We got it all back together and really gelled towards the end of the season. I feel we should have ended with 11 wins and seven losses, not the other way around, so close were some of our late season games," said Pollok.

The lows of the season, according to both manager Ranby and skipper Pollok were the defeats to Essex opposition, Romford Spitfires and Chelmsford Warriors. Both were beaten at Lea Bridge Road, but Lions suffered defeat away in matches that could easily have been won.

Lions were a slicker outfit as a whole last season. "Our young guys matured as the season went along, while the work ethic of some of older players like Paul O'Neill really stood out," says Pollok.

Coach Smolenko intends having the Lions competing in a tournament on the Isle of Man on May 10-11, against opposition from Solihull and Milton Keynes.

"We are still training every week and building up for the 2008-09 season and this tournament will keep us focussed," says Smolenko.

Captain Pollok concluded: "We now have a quality team and we're building to something better every year. I also see no reason why we can't be a top three side next season."



SUE RANBY: Oversaw an improvement during her first season as manager of the Lee Valley Lions.

TWO CITY KIDS THEIR MARI CAPITAL'S

TWO of Hackney City Tennis Club's young stars are proving forces to be reckoned with on the capital's junior tennis circuit.

Lauryn John Baptiste, aged eight, who attends St Pauls with St Michaels, Wilde Close, Hackney, has won through two Ariel regional nine and under tournaments.

The first was held at the National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Buckinghamshire and the other nearer home at the Islington Tennis Centre, just across the borough boundary.

The wins in both tournaments have entitled Lauryn a place in the national under nines Grand Prix, which is to be held in Bath this weekend.

Lauryn trains with her coach Chantel Coombs at the Hackney City club, based in Clissold Park, and is doing outstand-



LEE Valley Lions' Scott Beeson - top scorer for the club the past three seasons.