

Otago University Inline Hockey Club

2003 University Games Report

Simon Lovatt

Inline hockey is a fast-growing sport, similar to ice hockey, but played on concrete or wood, using roller blades. Originally developed to train ice hockey players in the off-season, inline hockey is now a sport in itself, booming with the popularity of roller blading, and being more accessible than ice hockey.

Formed in 2001 The Falcons, Otago University Inline Hockey Club (**OUIHC**) is one of the newest and hottest sports club at the University, and was one of the many teams to make the long journey up to Palmerston North to compete in this year's University Games.

Lead-up to the Games were intense, with the team's first and only practise together on the rubbery surface of Dunedin Stadium. This made a welcome change from the usual venue of the concrete courts at George Normal School, with hazards including drains, dodgy walls and ice-block sticks and occasional rain to be avoided. Credits must go to **Daniel Jang**, our team manager, for the superb organisation of the team.



match.

The Falcons had a daunting schedule of ten games in just three days with their first game against the host team, Massey A, featuring 6 NZ reps. Although several members of the team were mildly hungover, it was a respectable game ending with a 8-3 to Massey. It was the team's first match together, and for some a new experience playing on a proper (although very slippery) inline hockey rink. **John Thomsen**, our New Zealand rep. player was the hat-trick hero in this

From this first match the team went from strength to strength with big wins over both Massey B (9-1) and Victoria (11-1). The AUT team composed of overseas 'imported' ice hockey players and NZ womens reps played very physically (especially the chicks!) and they beat us 10-4. Only after a few games being played, spectators witnessed that inline hockey was one of the most dangerous sports in the Games with St. John's ambulance workers frequently attending the casualty of a cross-check into the boards, or the occasional stick to the head (and puck to the face!!).

Day 2 saw a second round robin and several players, especially **Andrew Sykes** and **Dave Mason** worse for wear after a hard night's drinking on the town. The other teams must have been on the piss as well as there were many bleary eyed players skating not quite as enthusiastically as they were the day before. A 5-0 loss to AUT was followed by a 12-1 win over Vic, with every player on the team took turns to

score a goal (except for the goalie), and later a 4-1 win against Massey B. The final match of the day was against Massey A. Our Canadian goalie, **Mark Eatherly**, loaned from Canterbury made many spectacular saves in the match, which ended 7-4. **John Thomsen** made a huge impact again, and the entire team played very well together.

The importance of the last day and semi-finals didn't stop many, mainly Massey B, players from drinking and was noticeable when Massey A won decisively over their B team, while Otago had the best match of the tournament, holding out AUT 5-4 during an exciting last two minutes of play. After losing to AUT twice in the round robin games, Otago came from behind to win the semi-final with only 45 seconds left in the game. The support of Otago crowd was also legendary. All of us jumped up and down with joy!



However, great crowd support in the final couldn't help a tired Falcons team, who didn't manage to hold out a superior Massey A squad, losing 10-0 (don't know what happened?) but still taking home the silver medal. This improved upon last year's bronze at Waikato, and **John Thomsen** was named the MVP of the tournament. However the last word was had by Massey B, winning perhaps the most important event of them all – the final night's boat race competition. Andrew, Dave and Daniel put in big performances for Otago but narrowly lost to Massey B. Where were you Nathan? All in all not bad for a team that practises on a playground!

Otago University Inline Hockey Club always welcome new members, especially beginners. All sessions are non-contact, great for fitness and loads of fun! Queries to **Tasha Szeto** on 467-9421 or tashaszeto@hotmail.com

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Simon Lovatt

p.s: Oh, did I mention that I was the team MVP?