

in-depth



The Debogorski family, top row, from left: Amelia, Curtis, mom Louise, Alex Sr., Shielo, and Julaine; bottom row: Glanna, Ezekiel, Alex Jr., and Benjamin. Missing from the photo are: Neison, Andrew and Dominic.

Team family

Fighting spirit of Debogorskis alive in broomball

Talk to any Debogorski, and you'll find "competitive fire" resides inside them. And that comes right down to fighting for the last pierogi on the table.

"Our family has a deep-seated competitiveness," said Curtis, the eldest son of the Debogorski children.

That comes as no shock when you consider that of Alex and Louise Debogorski's 11 children all are involved in sport, and many have a significant presence in Yellowknife's broomball league.

"Our family has a name for being in sports," said 16-year-old Julaine.

As patriarch of the family, Alex Sr. may have brought that "fire" when he moved to Yellowknife in 1976, but it goes back generations.

Competitiveness is a trait he said has always been in his family, right back to his relatives' involvement with the World Wars.

"That's all war is," he said. "Another competition."

Fighting with the British army, his father

was one of the few survivors of Operation Market Garden.

This was a failed Allied airborne military operation in the Second World War with the goal of securing a number of the main bridges of German-occupied Netherlands.

"The family had to compete for survival," he said. "Everything is competition."

That fire was passed on to Alex Sr. Maybe the first time it appeared was when Alex Sr., then two, had to be pulled away from the door in an Alberta home — he was shooting at a bear with a toy gun.

He would go on to shoot his first bear at 13, and became involved with several sports in his teenage years.

When he met his future wife Louise, however, things changed.

"The sport became chasing



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Alex Sr. moved to Yellowknife in 1976, and his family followed in 1977.

A few years later, he took up broomball with the Heavy Haulers at the league's start in the early 1980s.

Alex Sr. said that, as a tall and burly young man, it was violence that attracted him to the sport.

"It was full contact," he said. "People just about got killed."

"There's the competitive fire we were talking about," interjected Curtis.

Alex Sr. said the thrill of competition is what really keeps the family in sports.

His involvement in broomball has had an influence on his children.

"That's why the kids all got into it," said Curtis.

Alex Sr. recalled an incident where Curtis, then 13, lay down and cried in the stands because his father had lost a broomball game.

At 17, Curtis would become the first of the Debogorski children to follow into the sport.

Already playing hockey, Curtis



Alex Debogorski Jr. controls the ball with Inuvik Arctic Wolves player Al Bowerman on his tail during the 2006 NWT Broomball Territorials.

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IF YOU BRINK, DON'T RIDE.

in-depth

Sports always encouraged

sati, from previous page

as looking for something different.

"You either hate it or you love it," he said of broomball.

Curtis loved it, and, like his father, it was full contact that got him hooked.

"It's not a traditional sport so maybe it was uniqueness of it," he said.

Alex Jr. was 14 when he joined the junior age.

"My dad and my brother played and I had ached them growing up," he said.

It didn't take long for him to get hooked.

"My first game played I scored two goals and an assist," he said.

"I got hooked after the first season."

Although the eldest child, Shielo had a late start in broomball.

But that doesn't mean she wasn't exposed to just about everything else.

"I was the oldest so I got to go in everything," she said.

From gymnastics to karate, Shielo got to try it all.

"I figured the girl had to defend herself but I didn't realize she'd be a seven-foot tall," he said Alex Sr.

Doing gymnastics until 17, Shielo eventually took up ball hockey, which would be her "in" to broomball age 19.

"After playing ball hockey the girls invited me to broomball," she said. "After I got a taste it, that was it."

"It took me five years to feel like I accomplished anything."

Shielo became so fond of broomball she took it upon herself to enlist the rest of the family.

"I can always recruit them," she said.

She even pulled her sister Amelia, 17, out of a biology class last year to compete in the territorial championships.

Shielo even wants to take the family preoccupation a step further.

"One of the goals is to get a family team going," she said.

With a family so involved in sport, it most comes as a sixth sense for Amelia.

"Everyone else is always playing sports so it just comes naturally," she said.

She started playing broomball in Grade 8, and now plays for Yk Rebels women's team.

Promoting sports

As Debogorski matriarch, Louise said sport was always something that was encouraged in the household.

"Having so many boys, they needed to spend their energy," said Louise.

Judging by over two decades of school photos lining her living room walls, to say she is still has a handful is an understatement.

"I was busy running around the children," she said.

Although she did not much have time for her own participation in sports besides slo-tch ("that seems like another life ago") sport as always something she thought important for her children.

"We promoted it and they just have natural desire to participate," she said.

With the costs of equipment, travel, and registration involved with any sport in the northwest Territories, it's not hard for any parent to imagine the challenge of financing children involved in sports.

For the Debogorski parents, sport was always a priority.

"It's only expensive until you find the money then you forget about it," said Alex Sr.

"I thought it was more important they were



Back row, left to right - Manager, Molly Pilgrim, Coleen Ronsko, Sherry Connors, Betty-Anne Nickerson, Shielo Debogorski, Marilyn Hamoline, Jody Brandford, Dana Jones, Tina Setter, Lisa Harrison, Coach Gwen Woodward; centre row, Jan Vaillilee, Grace Lau-a, Terri-Lynn Locke; front row, Jessica Latour, Brenda Anstey, Kara Cooper, Val Pond and Amelia Debogorski



Back, left to right, coach George Peleniak, Dominic Debogorski, Ty Deans, Curtis Debogorski, Alexander Debogorski, Tyler Ilinik, Kevin Krawchuk, Nelson Debogorski, assistant coach Pat Fowler; center, left to right, manager Lynn Fowler, Kyle Shott, Freeman Smith, Sean Fowler, Ryan Smith, Mike Reddy, Andrew Debogorski, trainer Dave Ramsey; front row, Johnny Wallington, Doug Schaurte, Ian Fowler and Al Bowerman.

involved with sport," said Louise.

"We didn't spend money on other things. I found they were happier when they were active doing stuff."

For Alex Jr., sports was a chance to do things he otherwise could have missed.

"Just playing broomball I've travelled to every province besides P.E.I., Nova Scotia and Yukon," he said.

And he'll never forget the support from an understanding community.

Into one of the more expensive sports, Alex Jr. played hockey from age 6 to 19.

"The community was a very big support," he said. "Parents and coaches would pay for me to go (to tournaments). It's something that's always stuck with me."

The benefits are visible in the younger bunch of children as well as the older ones.

"It's fun," said seven-year-old Gianna, the youngest of the Debogorski bunch.

"I'm always bored at home so it takes my time," said Benjamin, 11.

For him the choice is very simple.

"It's either working for my dad, or playing sports," he said.

Ezekiel, 12, doesn't have any friends that aren't involved in some kind of sport, and can't imagine what it would be like to be without it.

"They are missing out on a lot of fun," he said.

Resonant amongst the clan was how a common sport kept the family together.

For Alex Jr., broomball is a way to stay in touch.

"We get to see each other two to three times a week in broomball," he said.

He said some family members only see each other at broomball.

"You always have someone to laugh at your jokes that no one understands," said Alex Sr.

"It's bonding," said Julaine, who made her debut in the broomball league last season.

"We never get to see the ones who live at home. You see them at the arena," she said.

For Amelia, it's just another place to hang out with out family.

"Going to the banquets and competing gives you something in common and brings us together," she said.