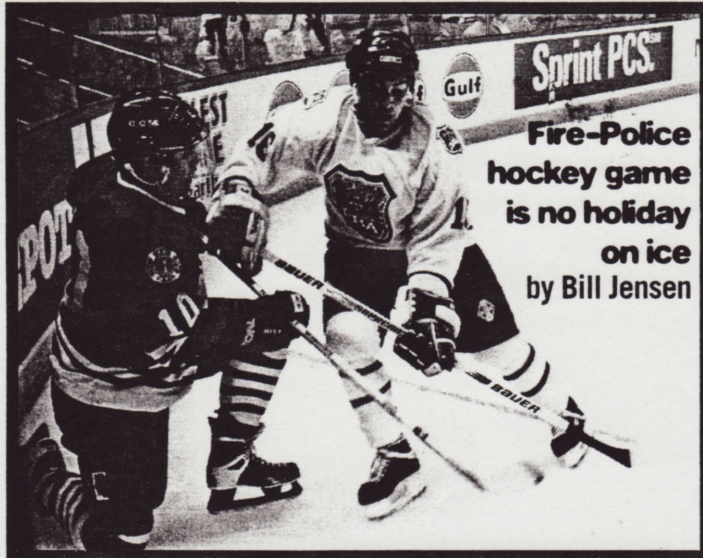


HAVE ANOTHER DONUT, YOU FAT PIG



KIRK CONDILES

**Fire-Police
hockey game
is no holiday
on ice
by Bill Jensen**

Firefighter Tom O'Meara, left, the game's MVP, battles Officer Angelo Pirozzi for the puck.

Call it New York's biggest drinking game, with 10,000 civil servants facing off across a hockey rink. At the 25th annual New York City Fire-Police hockey game at Nassau Coliseum last week, 40 of New York's Bravest and Finest traded their guns and hoses for sticks and blades. Their comrades cheered them on, draining cups full of foamy golden refreshment.

It was the battle for the bragging rights of New York, one beer at a time.

The game starts at noon, which puts a bit of a rush on things. Fans guzzle as much beer as they can in the parking lot before the Bud magically transforms from \$5 for a store-bought six-pack to \$5 a cup inside. But chugging amid the smoke from the tailgater's hibachis proves to be somewhat more relaxing. Once inside, you wait on line for 10 minutes to get into the bathroom.

At the police practice earlier in the week, I asked the cops which team would have more supporters.

"They have more fans," one guy said. "They don't do much work, so they'll all be there."

"Their name should be changed from the Bravest to the Most Rested," said another police comedian.

"The only two professions that get paid to be in bed are hookers and firemen," chimed in another.

"I dislike all of them, every one of them," Officer Bryan Kenney, 29, a big hitter who lives in Lynbrook, said of the FDNY while taking off his hockey gear.

At game time, I sit on the firefighters' side of the arena. They have slick red uniforms, they skate better in warm-ups and, most importantly, they aren't cops.

My seat is next to Jack Francis, a cop who played center in the first 10 games of the annual series. He is behind enemy lines shooting video for the NYPD squad. Back in the day, they knocked heads before Ranger games at the old Madison Square Garden. Francis remembers hearing that more beer had been sold to the 3,000 celebrants attending the Police-Fire game than to the Ranger crowd, which was five times larger. Looking across the rink to the raucous police fans feverishly guzzling, I ask my new pal Jack how many of the cops are carrying a piece.

"Probably all of them," he laughs. And faster than you can say "stray bullet," I am rooting for the fuzz.

THE PUCK DROPS HERE The guns on the ice belong to the firemen, as they take it to The Man from the drop of the puck. Somehow, though, Police goalie Frank DiGiacomo makes save after acrobatic save, looking like an armed Dominic Hasek, the Olympic hero. The NYPD is outplayed the whole period, but the first session ends with the cops up 1-0 on Mike O'Neil's weak dribbler through Fire goalie Jim McMorrow's legs.

I move over to the cops section for the second period. Fuzz fans are perched in their seats smoking cigarettes so furiously, it looks like it is legal to light up indoors again. Happy fans walk up the steps carrying four beers each, double the individual limit. I ask one security guard what they do if there are any problems, like, say a fight. He says the guards do very little: "They take care of their own."

The firemen finally break through with a screened shot, and I move back over to sit with their supporters. Shortly after I take my seat, firefighter (former cop) Tom Galiani picks up a loose puck at center ice and feeds the pass ahead, sparking a well-executed two-on-one.

The rink announcer turns the crowd's attention to a marriage proposal in Section 306, on the firefighters' side. This ignites a moment of crowd unity as Bravest and Finest join in a resounding, singsong chorus of "Asshole...

Asshole." But the spirit of togetherness is broken 20 seconds later when firefighter Jim Connelly

whips a backhand into the net, inspiring the derisive taunt of "Dunkin' Donuts!" from the Fire side. A yen for sweets may explain why the increasingly sluggish Police team loses every loose-puck battle the rest of the way. The firemen coast to a 4-1 win, their fifth victory in the past six years.

THE POST-MORTEM I wander into the locker rooms to conduct a post-game analysis.

"Can we have some soda for the refs?" a man yells into the firemen's locker room.

"We don't have any sodas, all beers," he is told.

In the police locker room, Kenney greets me.

"Hey, Clark Kent!"

"What happened?" I ask.

"They capitalized, we didn't," he says, pre-game insults giving way to tried-and-true clichés all-aspiring players study on *SportsCenter*.

Then he clinches my loyalty for next year's game—he offers me a beer.

SPORTS