

# NOTHING BUT NET ...



## Manon Rheaume Could Have Posed Nude, But She'd Rather Play Goal

**By Nancy Colasurdo**

**W**HAT'S IT LIKE to be in *Glamour*? Manon Rheaume shrugs her shoulders at the mention of the magazine.

How about being in a Toyota commercial? No real response there, either.

And what about being interviewed for the umpteenth time? Yeah, whatever.

But this interview will be different, she is told.

"That will depend on the questions," Rheaume said, shooting the interviewer a challenging look.

There is a straightforward quality about her that borders on rudeness, but it is easy to see where it originated. This is a 22-year-old woman who has overdosed on attention. She is the first woman to play in the NHL, and the first woman to start in a minor league game.

She finished the 1993-94 season with the Nashville Knights of the East

Coast Hockey League after starting it with the Atlanta Knights of the International Hockey League. Her 1993-94 season also included a brief side trip to Knoxville of the ECHL. In eight games in that league, Rheaume was 5-0-1 with a 3.90 goals-against average.

Although she wasn't invited to camp by the Tampa Bay Lightning this season, Rheaume didn't give up on hockey. Instead, she signed with the Las Vegas Thunder of the IHL. This

summer, she played for the New Jersey Rockin' Rollers of Roller Hockey International. Playing hockey is what she does well. It is, as she so eloquently stated on *Late Night With David Letterman*, her "passion."

Therein lies her dilemma. She loves the game, but does not want special treatment. Yet she is drowning in

have other opportunities, like a charity game and a model shoot for a magazine. It's fun, but I don't do this for the publicity. Can you understand what I mean?"

If not, just ask her agent about how she rejected a commercial that would have required her to change her hair color.

"I don't feel good the day after I miss," she said matter-of-factly. "The money is not important."

Neither are interviews. It's nothing personal. It's just the way Rheaume operates. While awaiting the start of a Rockin' Rollers practice at the Byrne Meadowlands Arena this summer, Rheaume motioned for her interviewer



**Rheaume is tired of answering questions about being the first female to play pro hockey. She maintains that she plays the game for fun, not attention, and will do endorsements only if they don't conflict with her game and practice schedule.**

endorsement proposals and hears fans chanting for the coach to put her in the game. Her worth is estimated at \$500,000.

"It is hard to explain," she said, balking at the monetary figure. "I don't play hockey to get exposure or to be the first woman. I practice every day. All that other stuff, I'm not doing this for that. For me, it's just play hockey and have fun. It gives me a chance to

"I said no, for sure," Rheaume said.

Or the quizzical look she gives reporters who ask her about September 23, 1992, the day she played the exhibition game for Tampa Bay and made history.

"I don't know the date of my first game," she said.

Or several lucrative endorsement deals that would have forced her to miss practice.

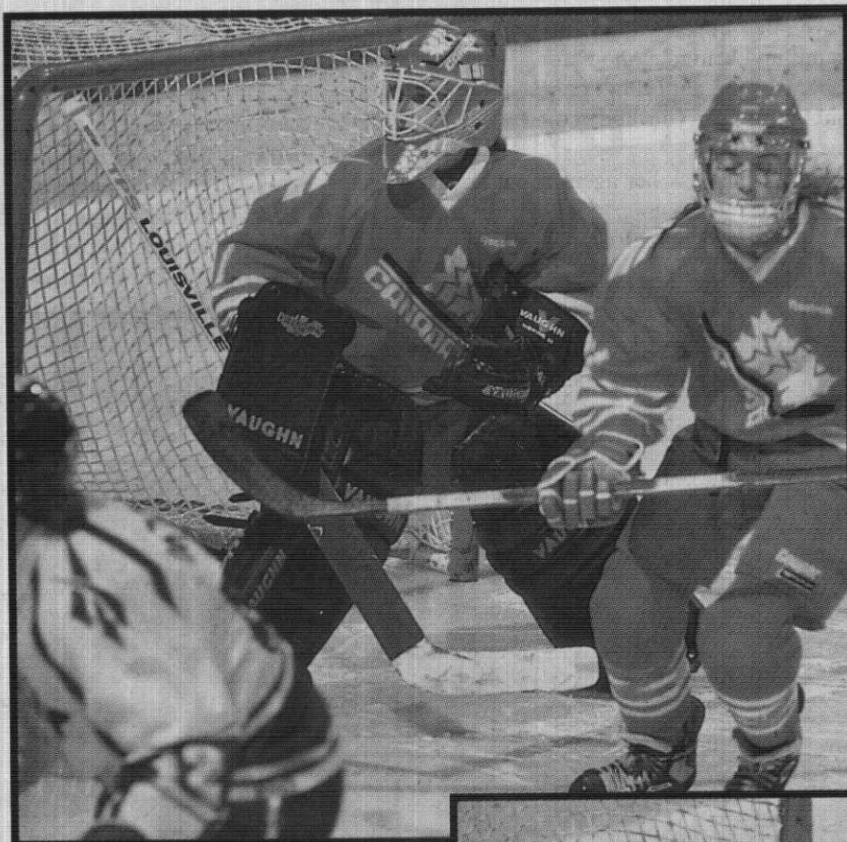
to sit.

The subject herself—dressed in shorts, a denim shirt, black sandals, and a blue-and-white plaid cap—preferred to stand, leaning against a counter in her personal dressing room, finishing what was left of some dry cereal.

"Don't mind me eating," she said. "I must have energy for practice."

The exchange began with a discussion of previous stories written about





**Rheume hasn't played much organized women's hockey in her life, but when she does, she is usually outstanding. She led Canada to a gold medal at the 1994 World Women's championships.**

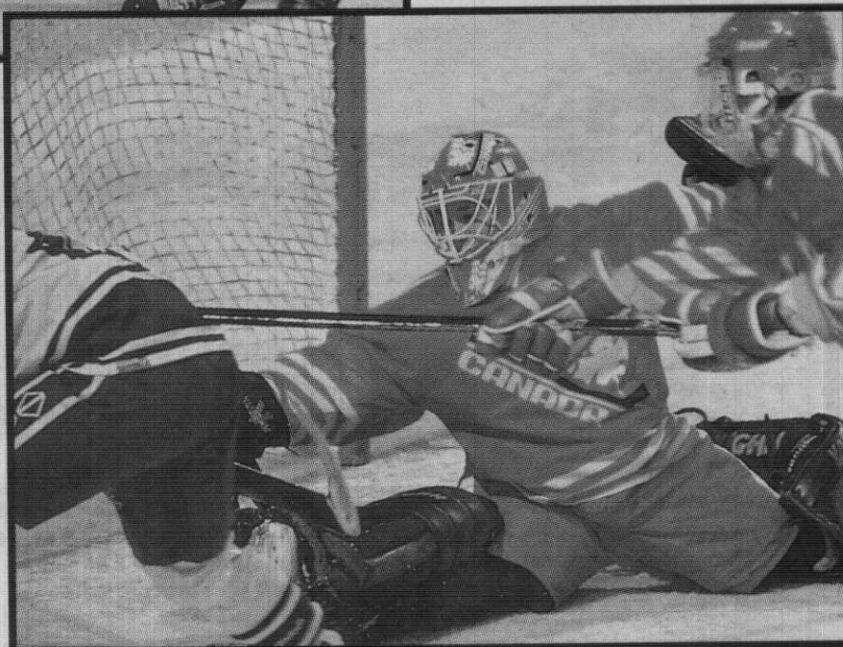
her. It was noted that in the picture accompanying one feature, she was sprawled on top of a net in a very unhockeylike position.

"Everyone thinks I have to act like a guy," she said. "So they want to show that [feminine] side of me.

"I don't feel I need to show that side. One reporter asked if I was not tired of making myself look good. I said I look that way because that is me. I am a girl. When the press comes to take pictures of me, I just want to be me."

For Rheume, a huge part of fulfilling that credo means playing hockey. She has been doing it since age five in Lac Beauport, Quebec. She has two brothers, one older and one younger than her. The younger, Pascal, plays forward for the Albany River Rats of the American Hockey League.

"We're still real close," she said.



"We support each other."

One might suppose that means a lot of lively family discussions on hockey strategy.

"Not really," she said, adding with a touch of indignance, "I practice all year long. I'm not just a hockey player. I like to talk about other things."

Does she ever, like shopping and cooking.

"I have a real interest in health food," she said. "I cook a lot of fat-free stuff. Fat-free deserts, too. I make a fat-free cheesecake. In my head, I use fat-free cream cheese. I take a couple things from different recipes and put them together."

And then add strawberries, perhaps?

Her eyes soften. "No, fresh blueberries."

Her interests, considered stereotypically female, are in direct contrast to the way Rheume makes her living. Poised and alert, she stood in front of the net in practice for the Rockin' Rollers as teammates sent pucks flying her way. Just as one puck kissed off her pad, a second sailed over her head. Then another. It's part of the rush that is hockey for Manon Rheume.

Ironically, the only time Rheume played organized hockey with other females was when she was 18. She has played with men the rest of the time, except during the World Women's Championships. Then she laces up her

skates for the Canadian women's team, which won the 1994 World title in Lake Placid with her in goal.

"The speed is slower," she said. "It's a big adjustment because being a goaltender is all about timing. With girls, there is no bodychecking. Guys cannot keep the puck as long. It is the same game, but little things are different."

The same can be said of roller hockey, which Rheume played for the sole purpose of continuing in the game after the ice hockey season concluded.

"I still see the puck every day," she said. "The timing, the feel of it."

With year-round hockey and an agenda packed with marketing oppor-

constant travel and taxing workouts.

"You need someone to understand your schedule," she said. "It's hard to find someone like that."

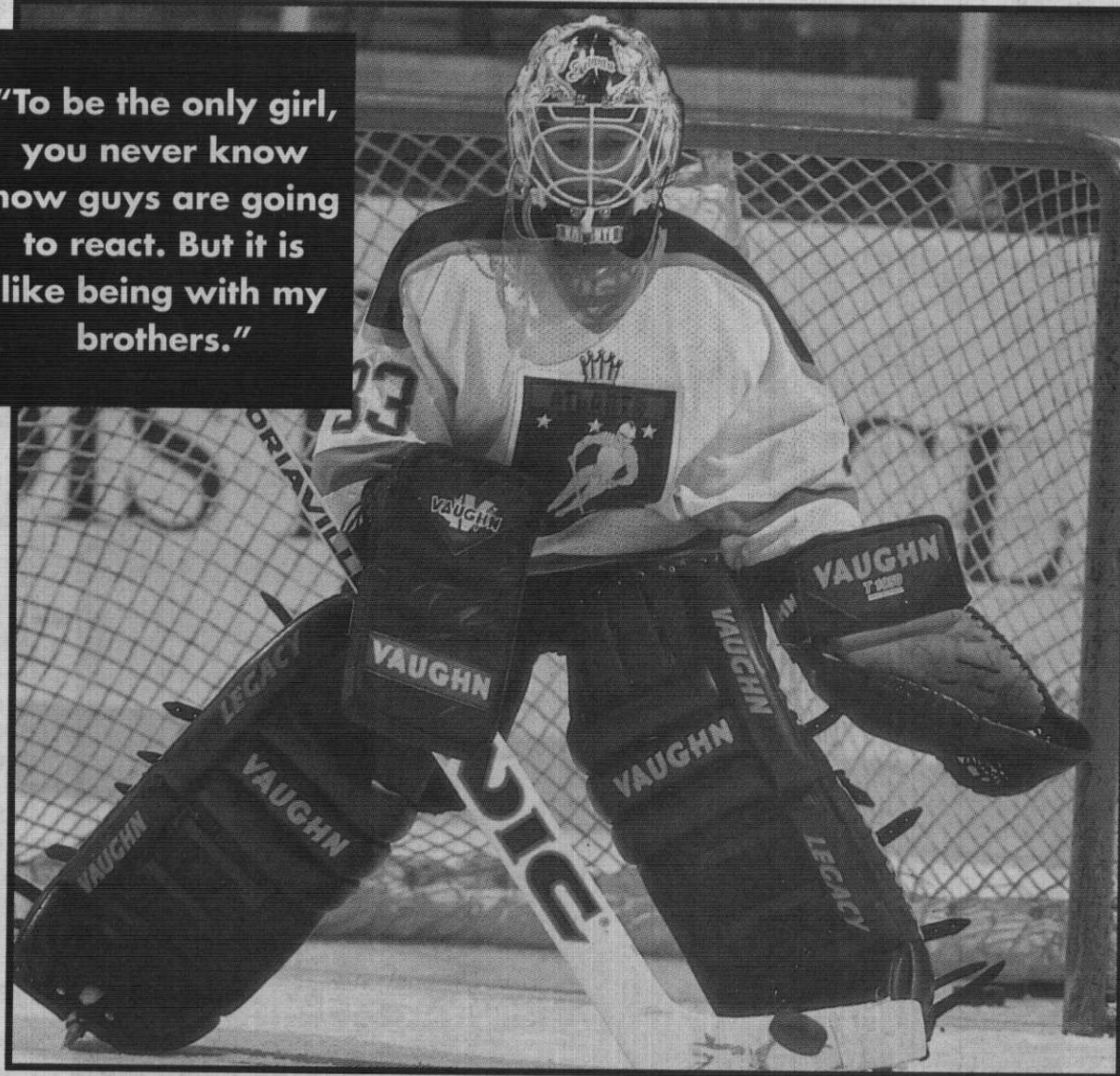
Rheume is more concerned with improving her game and maintaining the respect of her peers and coaches. Except for when they walk her to her

To her, the bottom line is that they have enough confidence in her to keep putting her in net.

That is her ultimate achievement. Not being in *Glamour* or on Toyota commercials or talking to Letterman.

"Life is more than money," she said. "I want to be out there with a smile."

**"To be the only girl, you never know how guys are going to react. But it is like being with my brothers."**



tunities, there is little time for relaxation.

"I have had no vacation since two years now," she said. "I would like to go to a spa. I could still train, get good food and a massage. One day, I will really need one. For the moment, there is no time."

There is no time for a boyfriend, either, with a schedule that includes

car at night, her teammates treat her like just another player and do not resent all the attention she receives.

"To be the only girl, you never know how guys are going to react," she said. "But it is like being with my brothers."

As for management, she noted she is not treated like a gimmick, although she is in great demand by the media.

Two years ago, *Playboy* offered her a tidy sum to wear nothing but that lovely smile. She said thanks, but no thanks.

"I was very surprised, for sure," she said. "I turned down *Penthouse* this year. I'm not into doing that kind of thing."

Must have been the wrong kind of cheesecake. ■