

World-class treat for P.G. ringette players

As a young ringette player, Laura Warner idolized Lisa Brown. And why not? With Canadian and world titles to her credit, Brown had risen to the absolute pinnacle of the game.

Then, one day in 1995, Warner found herself working alongside her hero when she was invited to become an instructor at Lisa Brown's Ringette Retreat. Warner and Brown have been part of the Ringette Retreat team ever since, teaching the skills of the game to players all across Canada.

When the Retreat made a stop in Prince George earlier this month, Warner had a chance to reflect on her time with Brown's school, which has the reputation as the most successful in the world.

"It's been 11 years, so certainly I've gotten used to it," the 26-year-old Warner said of her partnership with Brown. "I think there is a lot of mutual admiration, just in general. She's a really good person to work with."

Warner, who had been a ringette player since age seven, attended the Ringette Retreat in 1993 and 1994 as a player. With her flair for the game and her natural leadership abilities, she caught Brown's eye.

"I saw right away that she was a leader," said the 38-year-old Brown. "She went to the school and then grew out of playing at it and got into instructing at it. She has the qualities that we want all our instructors to have."

"Everybody who comes to our camp wants to be Laura. They look at her and say, 'That's a confident person.' She's funny, she's entertaining, she's relaxed with (the players) and she's also driven and accomplished and a great athlete. She's the kind of person the parents want their kids to grow up to be."

The Ringette Retreat, according to Brown, has between 70 and 100 instructors around the country. Some of the stops it will be making this summer are Ottawa, Winnipeg, Langley, Calgary and Edmonton.

"Our vision for the school is, it's a source of ringette excellence," Brown said. "It's teaching a mindset of excellence to players on and off the ice — winning on and off the ice, and what that's about for people. Our goal is to help them reach their potential. And it has to be fun. If the kids aren't having fun, they're not going to learn and they're not going to come back."

Between them, Brown and Warner own 15 Canadian championship titles and five world crowns in the sport of ringette. In 1996, they were both part of the Canadian team that won world gold in Sweden.

For Warner, the ringette road began in her hometown of Edmonton. After being introduced to the game, she knew in short order she had found her sport.

"I was hooked from Day 1," she said. "Of all the sports I've ever played, this one just has the perfect mix of the things that I really like."

A few years after Warner began playing, the national championship tournament came to Calgary. She was in the seats as a spectator and saw Brown play.

"That's when it dawned on me — 'Okay, you can be really good at this sport and you



Laura Warner and Lisa Brown, who have played for the national ringette team, were in Prince George to pass on their knowledge of the game. Story by Jason Peters

can travel and you can win really big championships.' From that day on, that's what I wanted to do — win nationals, win Canada Winter Games, win worlds, and play at the highest level for as long as I could."

Warner now has six Canadian titles to her credit and one from Finland when she played there in 2001-2002 in a semi-professional league. Along with her world gold medal in 1996, she has one from 2002, when the worlds were held in her hometown Edmonton. That year, Team Canada defeated Finland 3-1 in the final game. Skating to the top of the world in 2002 is a career highlight for Warner.

"I felt like the rink was full of my friends and family or kids that I've worked with at ringette school," Warner said. "My team picked me as the captain that year and that's when I got to really step into the role that I'd always wanted to play. For us to win it at home that year was just good karma. It was an unbelievable, whole-package kind of experience."

Brown, meanwhile, began her ringette career 30 years ago in Sudbury, Ont. It all began purely by chance.

"Honestly, a random stranger knocked on the door of my family house and said to my dad, 'They're starting up a new sport down the street, do your daughters want to play?'" Brown said.

"My (older) sister (Cara) and I both started. I wasn't the first generation of players, actually. There were two or three generations of players before me, so I had players to look up to and my sister was one of them. It was wonderful for me."

During her career, Brown has won nine Canadian championships and three world titles (1990, 1992 and 1996). She established herself as a clutch player when, in 1990 and 1992 victories at worlds, she scored the game-winning goals in

the championship games. In total, Brown spent 10 years with Team Canada (1990-2000) and was team captain the final four years.

Warner and Brown both still play competitively. Warner is a current member of Team Canada, and both women skate in the open division of the National Ringette League, which is brand new this season. In the NRL, Warner suits up for the Edmonton Wam and Brown scores her goals for the Calgary Rath. The NRL has teams across Canada.

"Two times a month, our teams travel and play league games," Warner said. "The goal, ultimately, is to win the league and the national championship, so that's a huge commitment."