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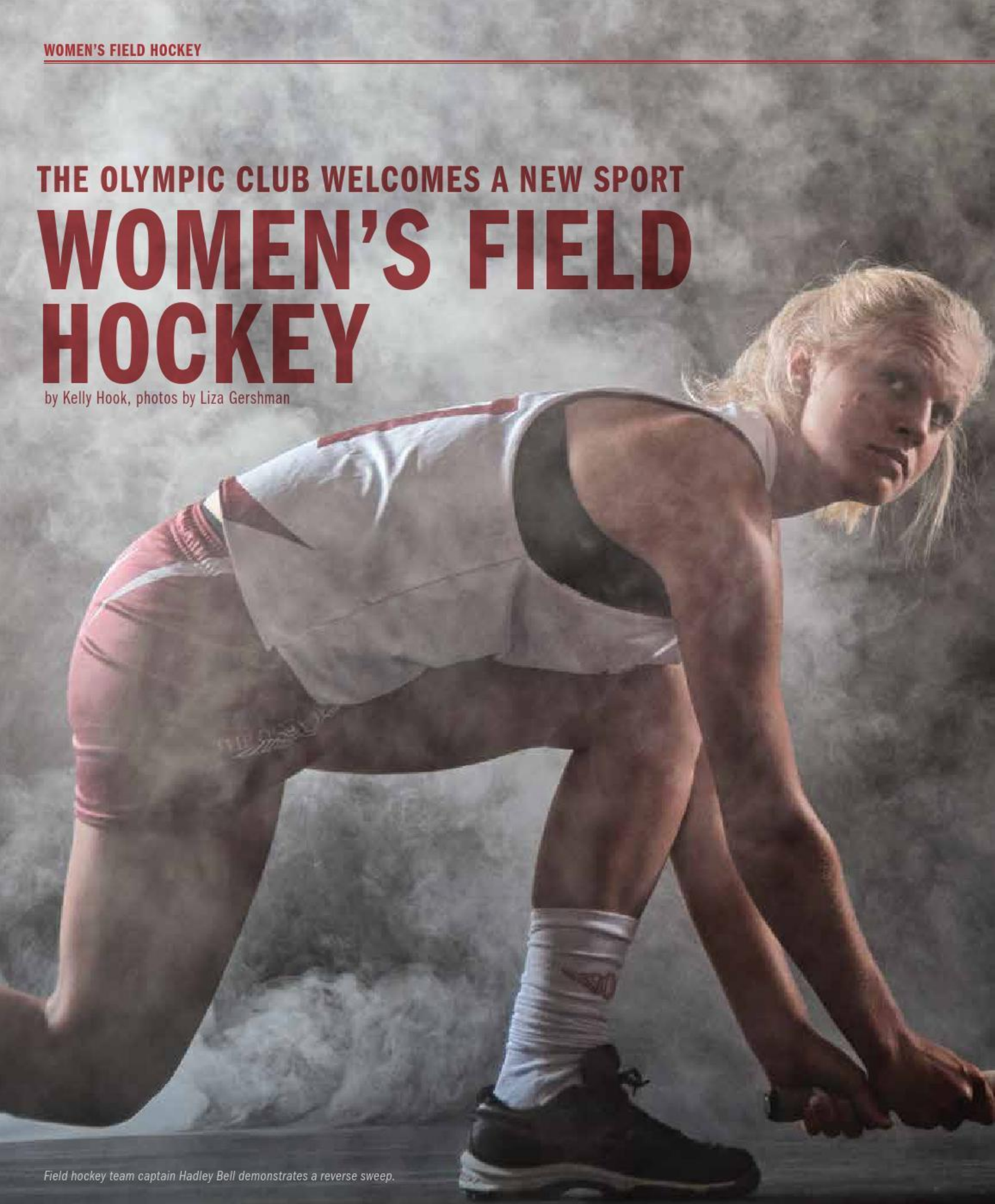


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THE OLYMPIC CLUB WELCOMES A NEW SPORT

WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY

by Kelly Hook, photos by Liza Gershman



Field hockey team captain Hadley Bell demonstrates a reverse sweep.

Forming a new sport at The Olympic Club requires a hunger to succeed coupled with an extreme passion for that sport, much like that of an entrepreneur beginning a new company. A burning desire to make it all happen — finding players with the ideal balance of talent and cultural fit, ensuring a great place to practice, building a sustainable financial model, garnering support from others and proving to the Board that there is enough 'market opportunity' to validate their existence in the first place — takes serious dedication.

That entrepreneurial fire and zeal certainly lives within the commissioner and founder of The Olympic Club's newest sport: women's field hockey. Savannah Devarney is the perfect person to usher this beautiful sport into the Club. Not only is it a new sport for the Club, it is also one of the first post-collegiate women's field hockey teams in the country — which highlights our Club's progressiveness and is a further testament to Devarney's determination.

As she has been building the foundation of the team, she has simultaneously been launching her own probiotics company, after having spent the last 10 years growing a neuroscience company, Brain Resource. Now Devarney, at only 30 years old, is charging into a new career while also bringing 20 talented athletes together to form this new team, one she hopes will become the pride of The Olympic Club.

"Our team is incredibly talented both on and off the field," Devarney remarked when asked to describe the new team's members. "Successful and driven as both athletes and working professionals but also fun, kind and collaborative. It's really an extraordinary dynamic that's emerged because the women are so special individually and even more so as a team."

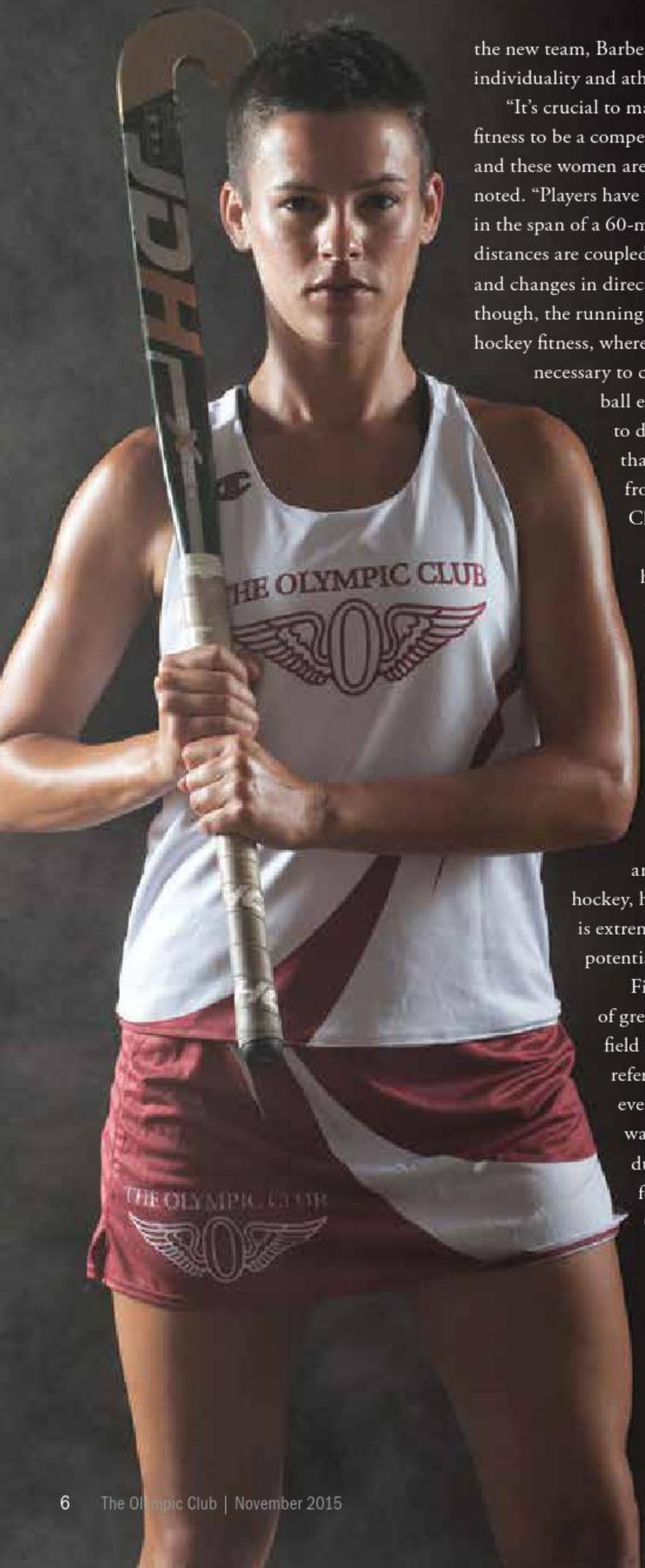
While they bring different types of experience and personalities to the team, they unite around their passion for the game of hockey and desire to compete. "There's something about continuing to develop as a competitive athlete with a team you're committed to even after the road to the NCAA title or the Olympics has passed," said Nicole Ng, one of the captains. "We always talk about how it brings this fire to our bellies that permeates throughout all aspects of our lives."

One of the most helpful factors in the team's evolution was the guidance they received from other established OC women's teams, particularly soccer and lacrosse, who shared their insights. "We spent a lot of time with their current and previous commissioners to learn what worked for them and what didn't," Devarney said. "The guidance from other women's teams at the Club was the key factor in our ability to be successful so early. We're so grateful for that!"

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> **— Savannah Devarney, commissioner**

The team is coached by Kevin Barber, who has been playing for the U.S. National Team for eight years, with 93 international caps, including the 2011 Pan American games. ('Caps' refers to a sanctioned international game; when a national team member plays for their country against another country, they earn a 'cap'.) When asked to comment on





the new team, Barber also highlighted their individuality and athletic talent.

"It's crucial to maintain a high level of fitness to be a competitive field hockey player and these women are committed," Barber noted. "Players have to cover up to six miles in the span of a 60-minute match and these distances are coupled with sharp accelerations and changes in direction. In many ways though, the running is the easy part of field hockey fitness, whereas the motor memory necessary to control, pass and shoot the ball effectively can take years to develop. I am confident that we will see great things from our new Olympic Club team."

The rules of field hockey are very similar to soccer. There are 11 players on a team, including a goalkeeper, defenders, midfielders and forwards. The only player allowed to use their feet and hands, as well as their stick, is the goalkeeper. There are no offside rules in field hockey, however, so the game is extremely fast and can be potentially very high scoring.

Field hockey is a sport of great tradition. In fact, field hockey, which is just referred to as 'hockey' most everywhere else in the world, was the first and only sport dubbed "appropriate for women" in 1800s Great Britain because it carried a certain level of elegance and beauty while also being a vigorous form of exercise and an accessible sport.

In those days, field hockey was always played on grass. Artificial surfaces started to become the norm in the 1970s and now the 'field' in field hockey is water-based artificial turf.

"Field hockey is unique because we need artificial turf in order to keep the ball speed fast enough," Devarney explained. "So we rent the local collegiate surfaces to play the game at our level. We are fortunate to have great relationships with the collegiate community and they're very supportive because our team is a pipeline for their players."

Relationships with the greater community are an important goal for the team. In addition to collegiate ties, they will also be taking on youth development and community involvement in greater San Francisco.

"We know that a rising tide lifts all boats, so we're developing the sport on the elite level while simultaneously getting local youth development going," Devarney shared. "We have already elected Kendall Beveridge to serve as our youth coordinator, and we have several high school coaches on our squad including all the most recent coaches from Saint Ignatius."

They also plan to market themselves within the national hockey community. "We want the United States Field Hockey Association to see The Olympic Club's investment in us as a model for building post-collegiate adult field hockey, which is actually one of their stated goals," Devarney said. "We want them to encourage other clubs to also invest in field hockey, both domestically and internationally, and then try their hand at playing against us! One of our major goals in 2016 is to build a local league for us to compete within. We'll be piloting that this spring."

For now, the team mainly competes at larger tournaments. This year, they've competed at CalCup and Canada Cup, two of North America's most difficult tournaments. Despite an ambitious entry into these tournaments so early in their career, they tied the reigning champions in both competitions. This month, they'll head to the U.S. National

Field hockey commissioner Savannah Devarney, the driving force who made the team a reality.

Festival over Thanksgiving weekend. In 2016, they're set to attend the 4Goals tournament at Brown University as a way to build visibility on the East Coast and amongst leaders within the national community. They're also encouraging and supporting a team in the development stages at the New York Athletic Club.

One of the most exciting things about the formation of this new team is their commitment to becoming a part of Olympic Club culture. The strength and conditioning lead, Kori Graff, has even designed a plyometric work out for the team that will also be useful for other athletes. She has opened up this class on Thursday nights in the yoga studio as a pilot for their team but they want to expand it to a larger space for other athletes. The program builds strength in field hockey-specific movements, which are the same movements needed by other athletes in sports like lacrosse, soccer and rugby.

The team trains together in the City Clubhouse gym on Mondays and often head down to Article III afterward — hoping to meet other members while strengthening their own camaraderie. "Our new teammates often know nothing about the Club and we are all so thrilled to be welcomed and supported as individual athletes and also as a sport and team. My main hope is that we build a visible team the Club can be proud of and wants to interact with. If people see us in Article III, I hope they'll say hello!"

Devarney welcomes notes from members who want to learn more, join the strength and conditioning program, or get involved. Her email is savannah.devarney@gmail.com. ■

FIELD HOCKEY FULL TEAM ROSTER

- Savannah DeVarney *(commissioner)*
- Nicole Ng *(captain)*
- Hadley Bell *(captain)*
- Haley Sanchez *(captain)*
- Kori Graff
- Kendall Beveridge
- Kellie York
- Holly Jenkinson
- Missy Coyne
- Sophie Valcke
- Lisa Lohre
- Elise Ogle
- Pili Mayora
- Maisa Badawy
- Veronica Sykes
- Lauren Talbot
- Kevin Barber *(coach)*

Team members Kori Graff (strength & conditioning lead), *Hadley Bell* (captain), *Nicole Ng* (captain), *Kellie York, Holly Jenkinson and Sophie Valcke.*

