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Sports

January 30, 2008

Girls hockey players turn words into action

Williamsville East-South defeats North in showcase game to promote sport
by PATRICK J. NAGY Reporter



Williamsville East-South's Sara Dibernardo, left, races Williamsville North's Chelsea Smith for the puck during East-South's 3-2 win in the Williamsville Girls Hockey Showcase last Thursday on the Amherst Pepsi Center Feature Rink. Pictured far right is North goalie Mickayla Haynes. Photo by John Normile Purchase color photos at www.BeeNews.com

Girls hockey may not happen next year in Williamsville but for one day it was a reality.

A team of seven girls from Williamsville East and another seven from Williamsville South defeated a team of 10 girls from Williamsville North, 3-2, in the Williamsville High School Girls Hockey Showcase last Thursday on the Amherst Pepsi Center Feature Rink. Approximately 150 people were in attendance.

The game lasted about an hour and a half and was treated like an official game. It included three 15-minute periods and two officials. Williamsville North principal Petrina Neureuter dropped the ceremonial first puck.

The North team wore jerseys that the boys team had for tryouts. East and South players wore their school's boys' Federation jerseys.

The showcase game was not affiliated with the Williamsville district, although several district Athletics Directors and Williamsville school board members watched the game as observers. And they saw every reason why girls hockey should be a varsity sport.

Five different girls scored and nine recorded a point. The play was slower than a boys game, but faster than a usual girls game, which was great considering the skill level ranged from girls who had several years of travel hockey experience to those who had just started playing in Amherst Girls Hockey's house league. There was no checking, a normal rule for girls hockey.

"I thought the speed of the game was unexpected because we had a lot of girls who have played different lengths of time," said East sophomore defenseman Nell Meosky. "It was cool to see everyone step up."

"To see the speed of some of these high school girls and what they can do with the puck and without the puck was really amazing," added North coach Rick Hopkins.

Hopkins was one of three North co-coaches in the game. The other two were Deb Patrick, wife of Buffalo Sabres' assistant coach James Patrick, and Mike Ball. The East-South team was coached by Mike Paulter, Holly Hubert, Kevin Kerr and Jim Baldwin. All of the coaches teach girls hockey at the house or travel level.

"It was a phenomenal experience," said Hubert. "I think the girls were thrilled to play for their school and demonstrated that there is an interest. By the amount of people in the crowd, there was also a lot of parental support. There were also willing coaches and a willing organization (Amherst Girls Hockey) to help out."

North, wearing jerseys that the boys' Federation team wears for tryouts, took a 1-0 lead 4:41 into the first period when freshman forward Emily Beauchamp scored from senior forward Kristin Ball on the only power play in the entire game.

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Williamsville North's Holly Flanigan, left, battles with Williamsville East-South's Jami Cohen (7) during the Williamsville Girls Hockey Showcase last Thursday on the Amherst Pepsi Center Feature Rink. Photo by John Normile Purchase color photos at www.BeeNews.com

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East-South tied the score 17 seconds into the second period after East freshman forward Shauna Clair beat North senior goalie Mickayla Haynes top shelf to the glove side. East freshman Sara Dibernardo and East sophomore Paige Pautler assisted.

East-South added two more goals in the second. South sophomore forward Melissa Green beat Haynes through the five-hole at the 9:04 mark and South sophomore defenseman Julie Wesolowski pounced in a rebound at 13:29 from East junior forward Katie Flaschner and Meosky.

Ball flipped a backhand shot past East-South goalie Darragh Kerr on a rush to the net at 6:09 of the third, but the Spartans could not get the equalizer.

"With only nine skaters, we were a little short-handed and we knew that might hurt us and it did in the second period," said Hopkins. "That's when they really won the game. We ran out of gas a little bit midway through the second but while the zamboni flooded the ice in between the second and third period, it gave them a chance to rest their legs."

"I thought we controlled the third," he added. "If we got the next one, it would have been right there but Darragh Kerr made some great saves all game long, especially in the third period when it was crunch time."

Kerr, unofficially, made 15 saves.

Girls hockey was original put on Williamsville's 2008-09 budget late last year but was taken off the table because there wasn't enough teams to play.

Pam Berus, the public relations spokesperson for the showcase game, said there was talk of schools in Munroe County in Rochester having four teams next year but they informed Williamsville Superintendent Howard S. Smith they will not be fielding teams. There are nine girls hockey teams in the state with the closest being Ithaca and Oswego. Berus said a team from Hilton, N.Y. will be having an intramural team this year with the intention of going varsity next year.

Berus, who has been one of the people trying to make girls hockey a varsity sport in Williamsville, said Smith has left the door open to put it back in the budget for the upcoming school year if something changes.

Judging by players and coaches, Williamsville deserves a girls hockey team.

"I think what we accomplished was this is not a joke," said North junior defenseman Kim Berus. "We didn't step on the ice last week. You could tell we've played the game for a while and I think we got that message across pretty clearly."

"Girls like me, I can't travel because six other kids in my family play hockey," said Meosky, who plays in the Amherst Girls Hockey 16U house league. "I need a more local team other than travel."

"I enjoyed the game more as a fan of girls varsity ice hockey and that what was on display," said Hopkins. "It was a showcase to show school boards around the area that girls hockey is alive in Western New York and needs to be taken to that next level as a school sponsored team."

Other North players competing were freshman forwards Tricia Larkin, Amanda Burns and Emily Woods, sophomore forward and defenseman Chelsea Smith and Holly Flanigan, respectively, and junior forward Jessica Czamara.

Other East players included freshman defender Jami Cohen and sophomore forward Marrissa Caggiano. South also had freshmen forwards Lauren Stall and Alicia Oswald, freshman defenseman Melissa Suszynski, and sophomore defenseman Lauren Baldwin and forward Julie Wesolowski.

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