

State celebrates the game on Hockey Day in Michigan

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By Christy Hammond

Multiple Hockey is Fun clinics put over 600 kids on skates all across the state

In a rink usually filled with NHL pros and their fans, two Hockey is Fun clinics brought the sound of children laughing and instructor's encouraging words to Detroit's Joe Louis Arena.

The clinics, created by the Central Collegiate Hockey Association as part of the Feb. 10 Hockey Day in Michigan celebration, gave over 60 first time players a chance to strap on skates and learn to play for free.

Participants were randomly selected after filling out an application and telling organizers why they wanted to learn to play hockey. Clinic instructors included coaches and players from Little Caesars midget major team and players from Ladywood and Detroit Jesuit High Schools.

“I like hockey, it’s fun, and I want to be an NHL pro,” said 10-year old Robert Devuyst, whose mother Marian brought him to JLA.

Clinic participants were each assigned a mentor from one of the high school teams and given their skates, personally sized and taped sticks, socks, and jerseys before heading out onto the ice. On the ice their mentor followed them around and helped them experience the fun of learning the game - whether it was picking them up after a fall, racing them around the face-off circle or playing goalie in a scrimmage at center ice.

Kristine Davis entered her two boys, Alex (9) and Connor (7), after hearing about the clinic from Baldwin Elementary in Rochester.

“They were thrilled to play hockey at the Joe,” Davis said.

Not only did the kids leave the rink with a free stick, socks, and jersey courtesy of Reebok and Perani’s Hockey World, they also received a goody bag filled with a hockey book, posters, a Detroit Red Wings’ calendar, bumper stickers and a voucher for pizza and pop at the Red Wings open public practice that day.

Nic Gumina helped out his dad, John, who was running the clinic. The most enjoyable aspect about mentoring some kids for him was the fact that “they can take the hardest fall you’ve ever seen and get up with an ear-to-ear smile.” Ladywood away captain Prenella Semma agreed that “seeing the kids smile” was her favorite part about participating in the clinic.

With so many new players and so many smiles, the Hockey is Fun clinics were viewed as a success by event staff, parents, and the participants themselves. “The parents had just as much fun out of this clinic as the kids,” said John Gumina. “This clinic is just to celebrate hockey because it’s a terrific game to learn, but this also gave the parents a no obligation exposure to see if their son or daughter has some ability.”

Five-year-old Gabe Mitchell was on the ice when former Red Wings captain Steve Yzerman made an appearance to talk to the kids during the clinic. Gabe’s grandfather, Steve, was probably more than excited for his grandson to be so close to a legend.

“I thought that was really cool because the kids really appreciated it,” he said. “It brought me back to when I was a kid watching Gordie Howe play and I wish I could’ve gotten that close to him. I know the kids really loved it.”

Instructors helped to hone the kids’ skills or just teach them how to stay up on skates.

“We helped them skate and learn how to put the equipment on, then we gave them a stick and let them go out and have fun,” said Little Caesars David Ellis.

Ellis also thought that Yzerman’s appearance made a difference.

“Some of the kids who kept falling, he told them ‘keep falling down, but to just get back up,’” said Ellis. “He also told a lot of the little girls that there’s a place for them in hockey and that they might get to play in the Olympics if they have that drive.”

Six-year-old Ben Rapai was brought to the clinic by his parents Steve and Cindy. Both of them play hockey and felt it was a good time for their son to try it out.

Ben didn't pick up skating right away but a Little Caesars player made his first time on the ice an enjoyable experience.

"Ben was very shaky at first but he did pretty well," Steve Rapai said. "The Little Caesars player helped him out the entire time and he did a phenomenal job with him."

"I fell down a lot," said Ben Rapai. "Everytime I would try to move my legs I would fall but I liked skating."

Cindy Rapai was pleased with how the clinic went.

"They did an awesome job," she said. "I would have liked to play though."

Ellis agreed. He thinks Hockey Day was a success.

"It's a great thing for Michigan hockey," he said. "It's getting a lot of kids involved, so it's good for the sport."

Fans get to watch Red Wings practice

Almost 2000 fans brought a slightly used piece of equipment (or paid \$5) to watch the Red Wings public practice at Joe Louis Arena on Hockey Day in Michigan. The gear and funds will go to the Detroit Hockey Association.

The Red Wings gave out Chris Chelios, Kris Draper and Dominik Hasek-autographed pucks and contest winners won tickets to the Michigan vs. Michigan game that night and also to the Feb. 11 Red Wings-Calgary game.

Detroit players practiced shooting, skating, passing, and did some 2-on-1 drills. Toward the end of the session, Tomas Holmstrom tried to deflect shots taken by his teammates on the blue line.

The kids in attendance got a kick out of Dan Cleary wiping out because it reminded them of themselves, especially those who had wiped out numerous times during the Hockey is Fun clinic held right before the practice.

With a file from Sarah Zientarski

Fourth annual Bourne Hockey Classic raises money for Hockey Has Heart

For the last four years Ann Arbor's Yost Ice Arena has hosted the Jeff Bourne Hockey Classic, a game between the Detroit Red Wings Alumni and the Michigan Wolverines Alumni held in honor of Jeff Bourne.

Bourne, who passed away in 2002 while playing the game he loved, was on the board for the Ann Arbor Amateur Hockey Association (AAHA) and also coached both boys' and girls' teams within the association.

“He just loved hockey and he had no prejudice at all. It didn’t matter if you were a boy or girl. It didn’t matter if you were a house league player or a travel player. He just wanted to help anyone interested in hockey,” said close friend and event co-chair Rob Palmer.

At Bourne’s memorial service, Palmer spoke with Wolverines coach Red Berenson and Red Wings alumni team captain Dennis Hextall and came up with the idea of having a U of M alumni game against the Red Wings alumni to benefit Bourne’s family. Several Michigan alumni players skated regularly with Bourne and were eager to play a game in his honor. The first game in 2003 raised money for the Bourne family and subsequent events have raised funds for Hockey Has Heart, a charity of “hockey people helping hockey families in need. This year’s game on Feb. 11 ended in a 5-5 tie in front of about 1700 fans.

“[The Bourne family] is excited to remember Jeff this way because he was so big into amateur hockey in the area. It was up to the family after the first game if they wanted to keep doing it and they were very enthusiastic about it,” event co-chair Karen Coulter said.

The AAAHA is in charge of the game including the selling of tickets and publicity of the event. Players within the association sell a majority of these tickets. Teams sold tickets to family and friends as well as setting up booths at high school hockey games and local tournaments. Dave Shand and John Bacon at WTKA also assisted in getting the word out about this year’s game. The AAAHA Mite 6 Blizzards sold the most tickets this year, 247 to be exact, and got the chance to play the Red Wings alumni in a friendly nine-minute scrimmage between the first and second periods.

“In the first year we tried a variety of avenues for selling tickets, but what we found was that the most successful way was face to face and explaining what [the game] was about,” Palmer said. In addition to the money raised from ticket sales, the Jeff Bourne Hockey Classic also held a silent auction during the first two periods. Items in the auction were provided by 25 organizations including the Detroit Red Wings Alumni Association, NHLPA, and the USA Hockey National Team Development Program. Some of the items auctioned away included an autographed Robert Lang replica helmet, signed Jason Williams’ photographs and an autographed Dominik Hasek stick.

Before the start of the game, the Red Wings Alumni Association presented a \$15,000 check to benefit the UM Comprehensive Cancer Center. The money was raised during the association’s annual golf outing held in June 2006. All of the proceeds from the Jeff Bourne Hockey Classic IV went to Hockey Has Heart. The AAAHA is only reimbursed for expenses related to sponsoring the event and the fees paid to the Red Wings Alumni go to their designated charities. The final figures have not been finalized yet, but Coulter estimates that \$5500 will be donated to Hockey Has Heart from this year’s game, which Coulter called a “big party in Jeff’s honor.”