

TEARING UP THE HOCKEY LANDSCAPE

Northern Cyclones an Eastern U.S. powerhouse after just five years of existence



Falmouth, Maine, resident Mike Chase goes over and around a Portland Jr. Pirates defender during a Nov. 20 match. The match was held as a fundraiser for a member of the Cyclones' Mite team whose parents died suddenly, showing the Jr. Cyclones' commitment to the community.

By Joshua Boyd

The Northern Cyclones are more than just a hockey team – they are more than a family – the Cyclones are a community.

When one Cyclones player is in need, at any level from Mite through Junior A, all involved with the organization – players, parents, coaches and supporters – band together to help out.

The Cyclones put this theory into action. Both parents of Beau Vernet, an 8-year-old playing on the Cyclones' Mite Major team, died suddenly, leaving Beau and three older sisters to live with their grandparents.

On Nov. 20, during a Jr. A Cyclones game against the Portland Jr. Pirates, there was a 50/50 raffle and a silent auction held to benefit the Vernet Children's Fund. Cyclones players of all ages at the youth level came to the game in their jerseys, while the Jr. A Cyclones dealt the Pirates a 10-1 loss.

"The Cyclones community has a family-type orientation," said Bill Flanagan, the Cyclones' co-founder (with brother Joe) and Jr. A head coach. "You just have to look at how many people came out for the [Vernet Children's Fund Benefit Game] – we had a little over 700 people and raised over \$12,000.

"We stress that relationship – when

you join our program, you're not just coming to play for a junior program," Flanagan added. "Outside of your typical hockey responsibilities, your other responsibility is to be a role model to the kids in our organization. It gives parents comfort when their kids come to play for us. They're coming to a program where other values are stressed, besides the X's and O's."

However, in terms of X's and O's, the Cyclones are tic-tac-toe maestros. Both the Jr. A and Jr. B Cyclones teams have banners to prove the expertise of the organization. In just five years of existence, the Jr. B team has won the North Division in the Metropolitan Junior Hockey League and has made one appearance in the Jr. B Nationals (2007-08).

The Jr. A team has accomplished even more – a trio of Tier-3 Jr. A Nationals appearances, two Atlantic Junior Hockey League championships and three consecutive North Division titles (2007-2009) in the AJHL.

Along with all of these on-ice honors, the team also has churned out more than 30 college advancements to the NCAA Division 1 and Division 3 levels.

Players from all over the country, and even overseas, have seen what the Cyclones have to offer and have made the journey to Hudson, N.H., where the organization owns the Cyclones Arena.

Arnaud Gottschall, who joined the Cyclones as a 1989-born player all the way from Geneva, Switzerland, said he has already talked to colleges in his first year stateside.

"The Cyclones have a very good, very professional organization, they are determined to win every game," said Gottschall. "The rinks here are smaller, but I like it very much. There are good opportunities to play college hockey. I've talked to Division 3 colleges, but I would like to play Division 1, that would be great."

Kevin Naab joined the Cyclones after winning the Jr. B National Championship with the Suffolk PAL in March. He'd be thrilled to do the same at the Jr. A level.

"The Cyclones looked at me at Nationals, and I knew Bill Flanagan was a good coach and this is a great organization," said Naab. "Last year was a big confidence-booster. I can keep my head up now, with a national title under my belt. Two Nationals rings would be nice, though."

Development is No. 1 mission

Players like Naab and Gottschall are just the type of athletes that Bill and Joe Flanagan are looking for. The two brothers and coaches have been around nearly every level of hockey imaginable.

Bill has coached and won league championships at both the Massachusetts Division 1 high school level (at his alma mater Austin Prep High School) and the prep level (Lawrence Academy) after a Division 1 college playing career at RPI. Joe Flanagan played for the University of New Hampshire and enjoyed a two-year stint in professional hockey, which saw him win the Rookie of the Year award in the ECHL in 1993.

With so many different views of the game at different levels, the Cyclones coaching staff bring all of this know-how to Cyclones Arena every day and pass it on to the players.

"Someone made a comment, saying 'The reason I like your program is you're developing your players,'" said Bill Flanagan. "We're not getting the white-collar stud who already has a commitment or is already on the radar screens of Division 1 programs. We're getting kids who need to be developed.

"Take a kid like Corbin Rosmarin. He came in as a third-liner at the Northwoods School, he comes through our program and now he's at one of the top Division 3 schools (Geneseo State)," Flanagan added. "Evan Carriere was a three-year guy who developed into a Division 1 player [at the University of Connecticut]. Joe and I have used what made us successful in playing Division 1 hockey. Additionally, the ice time they receive is virtually unlimited."

Along with the two-to three-hour practices five times a week, players have access to the ice for an additional two to three hours daily. The Jr. A team also has its own private locker room and an in-rink weight room.

The Jr. A players also join the youth teams on the ice to help out the youth

coaches.

"That's a huge part of the program," said Bill Flanagan. "They're out there every week with the youth kids. It's really a nice community within the Cyclones family. Our crowds are traditionally good – that makes it special and unique. We go to some other buildings and there's no one there, but here we have a following."

"It's fun, it's just like going to a school or a college," said Jr. A co-captain Mike Chase, of Falmouth, Maine. "You don't see that on a lot of junior teams."

The organization is looking to create a straighter pipeline from its youth to Jr. B to Jr. A ranks. Another former Division 1 player, Paul Russo (Northeastern), runs the bench for the Jr. B program, alongside fellow Jr. B coach Wes Dolloff.

"We're not there yet. We're trying to get that development ladder going," said Flanagan. "Sean Swansen started in our program in Squirts and played through to Jr. B and now he's on our Jr. A team. Kyle Crowley and Mitchell Dolloff, both on our Jr. B team, played for the Cyclones youth teams."

Along with his administrative and Jr. A coaching duties, Bill Flanagan is also the head coach of the Cyclones' Bantam 95 team.

"There are kids on that team who are on the cusp of being able to play Jr. B, including Adam Crowley, Kyle's brother. He's played four games [scoring one assist] for the Jr. B team," Flanagan said.

From top to bottom, the Cyclones are united in their mission to train and develop the next generation of college hockey players, and also to develop old-fashioned "good people."



John McGinnis, a 1990-born forward from Cocoa, Fla., was on a point-per-game pace with 21 points through 21 games in the first third of the season.

Photos by Nicole Goodhue Boyd