

# Kelowna hockey academy gets top grades

BY BY DAVE WADDELL, THE WINDSOR STAR    OCTOBER 23, 2009



Former Philadelphia Flyers assistant coach David Roy wasn't shy about his goals when he left the NHL to set up his own hockey school in Kelowna, B.C.

The aim is as obvious as the title — The Pursuit of Excellence Hockey Academy.

With a slew of players drafted into the Western Hockey League and several more being absorbed into the national program stream on the girls side, its safe to say Roy is making ground in his pursuit.

"We're not just a school for elite players," said Roy, who has brought the academy's midget AAA and AA girls teams east to compete in this weekend Hocktoberfest Female Hockey Festival. "We've got kids who were playing house league or single A travel.

"We do have some high-end players, but our goal is developing kids as hockey players and people. My wife and I have worked with kids all our life and thought hockey was a great way to help accomplish both those goals."

Working with the public school system in Kelowna, players spend half the day in class and half the day working on their hockey skills. Their school day starts at 7:30 a.m. and training wraps up by 6 p.m.

They're on the ice two hours each day, but also go through dry-land training and workouts as well as clinics aimed at improving their skills and mental preparation.

The students, who range from 12 to 17 years old and attend Grades 8 through 12, will get a 1,000 hours of hockey instruction and training over the 10 months. The yearly program runs from September to June.

"Kids are motivated because of the hockey," said Roy, who founded the school in the fall of 2003. "But the bottom line is only a half a percent will play pro hockey or make it into the Olympic program.

"We don't want them to be disappointed going through the program, so that's why we emphasize academics, learning life skills and values.

"Our kids go to Mexico to help build houses. They go to the Gospel Mission in Kelowna to help feed the homeless.

"It's not just hockey. Schooling is No. 1 for us."

However, excellence does come with a cost.

Annual tuition is \$15,000 per year for Canadian students plus another \$4,000 to cover the seven to eight tournaments academy teams attend across North America each year. Tuition for international

students is an additional \$6,800.

The cost of billeting out-of-town players for their 10-month stay is \$7,000.

Roy, who was scholarship hockey player at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, got the idea for the concept after watching his summer skating schools balloon to over 2,000.

In addition to the kids who were looking to strengthen their skating, Roy began working with NHL players from a variety of teams including San Jose, Dallas, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The Flyers hired him as the NHL's first full-time skating coach in 1999.

Roy, who was a trial lawyer before giving up law 15 years ago to work full-time in hockey, has also worked with the national men's and women's teams.

"Skating was my forte as player," said Roy, who worked with Roger Neilson, Bill Barber, Craig Ramsay and Ken Hitchcock in Philadelphia.

"I started my first skating school when I was 19.

"It got so big over time. When I came back from the Flyers in 2003, I thought the time was right to try this idea I'd had."

What started with 26 players the first year has grown to 110 students spread over four boys teams and the two girls teams.

The student body has an international flavour about it with players coming from Europe and the U.S. There's also a heavy dose of players from outside of B.C.

One of those is Melville, Saskatchewan native Jessica Campbell, who is captain of the midget AAA team.

The 17-year-old forward is one of three players on the team who are members of the Canadian under-18 national program. Also on the under-18 team are Christine Bestland and Bridget Lacquette.

"What I like about the school is I get to live and breathe hockey," Campbell said. "I came because I thought this was the best place for me to develop as a hockey player.

"Coming here has allowed me to get a good experience in hockey, but also develop with my teammates and in my schooling.

"It was hard leaving home, but I wanted to take the chance and I've loved it."

With aspirations of landing an Ivy League hockey scholarship this year and to continue her progress with the national team, Campbell admits the challenging academy program has been perfect for her.

"The first two weeks were hard last year," said Campbell. "Then you realize you're capable of doing so much more than you thought.

"It's amazing that I'm doing things I never thought I could do."

However, Campbell cautioned that the program isn't for everyone even if they can afford the cost of

attending the academy.

Regardless of skill and financial background, if you don't have the will then you're wasting your time.

"The people that come here are very determined," Campbell said.

"It's a place to go to improve. The more you want it, the better you'll do.

"If you're not strong willed and your heart is not fully in it, you won't do well there."

Roy said the academy doesn't recruit students. As the academy's reputation grows, there's more interest than openings available.

"I've had parents of nine year olds tell me they're already saving so they're child can attend," Roy said.

"They come because they want to come. We're very careful in selecting kids.

"We look at ability, character, work ethic and we do a lot of checking with the schools they attend. We're not just looking for the best player. We're more interested in work ethic and character."

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