

Puck brings luck on tour of Europe rinks

Kyle Sauro, 14, carries a good luck puck in his duffle bag.

The Grade 8 Glad Park Public School student is a member of the Stouffville Bantam A Clippers, currently on a four-game hockey tour that will take them to the Czech Republic and Austria.

The team will also attend the World Junior Hockey Championship in Prague before returning Jan. 7.

Before leaving, Melissa Willis, Kyle's Grade 4 teacher, arranged a meeting at Boston Pizza for her former student and Howie Jones, a centre ice star with the 1972 bantam club that journeyed to Switzerland 36 years ago.

Jones, Willis' uncle, then lived in Claremont but now resides in Oshawa with wife Cathy and his mother, Gloria Jones. Howie and Cathy have two daughters and one grandchild. Howie is employed with the city's search and rescue unit.

In an act of support, Jones presented Kyle with a 1972 tournament puck. His mother had it mounted on an engraved silver stand. On it is inscribed the number 5, for how many goals he scored during the tourney.

Jones centred a line with Keith Acton, now assistant coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs at left wing and Doug Feasby at right. The team captain was Doug Todd. Goal-tenders were Don Whitehead and Kevin Hamilton.

The '72 club won all of its six games and later defeated Petrolia for the provincial championship. The Ontario finals were played at Uxbridge. The Stouffville arena, then on Park Drive South, had been condemned.

Kyle, totally surprised, was hesitant to accept so treasured a gift. "What if I lose it?" he asked.

"Then it'll be back close to the area from where it came," Jones replied.

"I hope it'll inspire you," he said.

Ms Willis arranged the meeting, suggesting her uncle might have some words of wisdom to pass on to her former pupil, since he once enjoyed a similar experience.

Jones responded.

"Remember, you're not playing only for Stouffville, you'll be representing your country, Canada. Like it was with me, this tournament will be a time in your life you'll never forget," he said.

Jones carried with him a folder containing reams of photographs and stories related to his memorable '72-'73 season.

During his meeting with Kyle, Jones emphasized the



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

importance of education.

"Keep your school grades up," he urged. "Learning skills will remain long after your hockey days are over."

Lee Palladino, the team's assistant coach and trainer, said Kyle earned a spot on the club through sheer desire. He wasn't a member of last year's roster, Palladino explained, but his determination so impressed the coaching staff he was welcomed aboard.

The trip costs \$3,300 per player. In '72, the per player share was \$430.

Close to \$60,000 was raised through various projects, Palladino said. "You wouldn't believe the hockey spirit in this town".

While the tournament is important, like the team of '72, the ultimate goal is winning an Ontario title, Palladino said. So far this season, the club has recorded 24 wins, no losses and two ties in regular York Simcoe League play.

Jones felt fortunate to play on a line between two great wingers, Acton and Feasby.

"Doug (Feasby) was a terrific skater," he said. "And Keith (Acton) could go like the wind."

"He, (Acton), was initially a speed skater, just like his mother," he added.

He also praised team management, including coach Jack Watson; managers Wilf Morley, Gerry Acton and Dent Smith and OMHA convener Ed Grimshaw.

Jones described Watson as "the best coach I ever had"; Morley, Acton and Smith as "tremendous", and Grimshaw as "the leader of the pack".

After leaving Stouffville minor hockey, Jones played Junior B with the Pickering Panthers.

The team's return flight is expected to touch down at Pearson Airport Jan. 7 around 3:30 p.m. While each player is expected to bring home memorabilia, Kyle Sauro will carry the most treasured keepsake: Howie Jones' good luck puck of 36 years ago.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

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