

The Wolves' Den of Development

Specialization is key to New England Wolves' junior hockey program

By Joshua Boyd

Sometimes, the best way to focus in on the development of your individual game in hockey is to get away from distractions.

The New England Wolves are your answer. More than an hour away from the closest city, the Wolves play at the Merrill Fay Arena in Laconia, N.H., situated in the heart of New Hampshire's Lakes Region.

While winter sports do draw a fair amount of tourism, the area is mostly quiet, and affords Wolves players the perfect opportunity to zero in on all the areas for improvement with great concentration.

The Wolves also offer some of the best small ration of coach-to-player instruction in the Eastern Hockey League and EHL Premier, thanks to its position-specific skills sessions throughout the week.

"We are the smallest organization in our league. We have our EHL team, the EHL Premier [developmental junior] team and a split-season Midget program," said Wolves EHL head coach Andrew Trimble. "We stress quality over quantity."

The extra sessions have helped. The team had eight wins in December after posting eight wins through all of 2016-17.

"We'll have power skating on Tuesdays, defenseman skills with Coach Tim Kunes on Wednesday, forwards only on Thursday, goalie sessions with Coach Rob Day, and then we have full team skills," Trimble added. "We're increasing the skill level of our players within the team concept."

Trimble and assistant coach Kunes (also the Wolves' EHL Premier head coach) implemented the new skills-based team practice program to the Wolves this year. Trimble brought in Kunes after the latter finished his playing career, a career that included stops on the blue line at Boston College, the ECHL and three European leagues.

"He was a National Champion with Boston College [2007-08], and was drafted by the Carolina Hurricanes," said Trimble. "He works directly with our defensemen."

Former Wolf and assistant coach Dillon Smith works directly with the forwards.

"You're looking at close to 10 hours of practice per week, plus video in a classroom, and our fitness facility is across the street from the rink," Trimble added. "The kids get a lot while they're here. We see a big jump in their game, hockey IQ and fitness level in December, January and February. You're seeing them excel at the routine."

The Wolves development model and quiet location at the foot of the Gunstock Mountain ski resort was certainly enough to attract '98 forward Blake Harlow to join for a second season out of Atlanta, Ga. Asked what he likes about the Wolves program, he goes into a list.

"The ice time, the two practices a day, a workout every day, power play video, penalty kill video, 5-on-5, other teams' video," said Harlow. "I'm trying to develop

my game, and ice time is by far the best thing to develop."

Harlow was able to convert a high-scoring season in the developmental EHL 19U Elite Division last year to a high-scoring season in the top EHL division this year. He had 25 points in 31 Elite games last year, and he has exactly the same numbers at the higher EHL level this year. In 15 games at the EHL level last year, he did not have any points, so he has definitely seen his game progress.

"When I went back home after the season and skated with my old friends, my Dad could really tell how far I had come," said Harlow.

The proof is in the promotion

All of the work Harlow continues to do with Trimble and the Wolves should pay off handsomely.

"The EHL is such a great Tier-3 league for exposure to college coaches. The league has four showcases, including one [in December] in Walpole when all the college are off, so I knew almost every Division 3 school near Walpole [would be] watching every game," said Harlow. "I've set up tours with some schools, and toured one other. The State University of New York schools will drive seven to eight hours to see our games, so it's great exposure here."

The New England Wolves were founded in 2012 as part of the American Hockey Institute, which was originally founded at Waterville Valley, N.H. Since then, the Wolves have placed 70 players into the college hockey ranks.

One standout is Collin Bourque, a former Midget player who joined the University of New Hampshire NCAA Division 1 team for three seasons.

"We have a good number of alumni in the SUNY Athletic Conference," said Trimble. "Eric Bogart, a two-year player in our program, was last year's SUNYAC Player of the Year."

"We also just had two brothers face each other in a game," said Trimble. "Max Kent, one of our captains, plays for Southern New Hampshire and Sam Kent is with Suffolk."

The team is younger this year, with six '97 players on board.

"We will get 100 percent college commitments. Some are talking to the SUNY schools, and we had three kids on the campus of Framingham [Mass.] State University," said Trimble.

The team works to make sure players are college-ready, academically, when they show up on campus the next year after they finish with the Wolves.

"We offer the availability of college courses. With the exception of a couple kids, every one of our players are at Lakes Region Community College, or online," said Trimble.

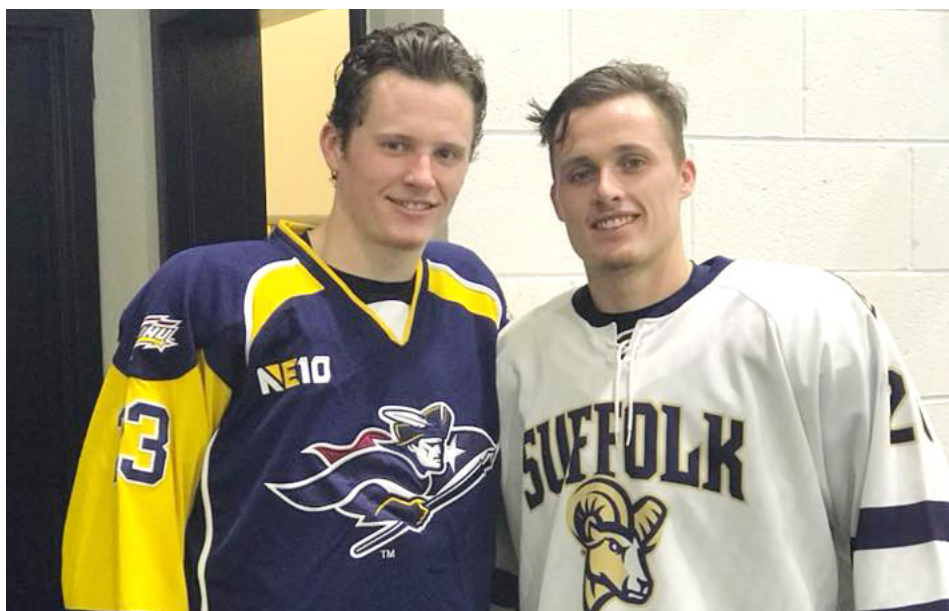
The Wolves staff includes Dave Pollak,



Roger Powers celebrates a goal for the Wolves, who have already equaled their entire 2016-17 wins total, with a half season still remaining to build on that. *Courtesy Photo*



The New England Wolves go through a position-specific practice session at the Merrill Fay Arena. *Courtesy Photo*



Max Kent, of Southern New Hampshire University, and Sam Kent, of Suffolk University, are a pair of brothers who played for the New England Wolves on their way to NCAA hockey careers. *Courtesy Photo*

Academic Advisor and Peak Performance Coach. His passion is for helping people to achieve excellence by harnessing the power of neuroscience through self-awareness, mental preparation, and behavioral change.

The Wolves are heavily involved in developing the character of their players, as well.

"We are committing kids who are good kids and good citizens," said Trimble. "This is a small area, and we have over 1,000 man-hours in community service in the Lakes Region. We're doing a big toy

drive this month, we've done community beautification projects and we hold a Pond Hockey Classic in February."

The Wolves also work closely with the youth hockey program, the Lakes Region Youth Hockey Association.

"It's a small youth hockey organization of 92 kids. They look up to these Wolves players," said Trimble. "At Tuesday night skills sessions for the Lakers, our Wolves players skate with them."

Playing for the New England Wolves is a complete hockey experience -- without distractions.