

Dreams come true for Novice Tigers



By Jake Courtepatte

Standing on the ice at the Air Canada Centre is a dream of many kids in the GTA's minor hockey systems.

For the Novice AA Aurora Tigers, that dream came true on Sunday.

The team was one of sixteen teams from across Southern Ontario to take part in the Ford Drills and Skills Competition, selected to join Maple Leafs and Raptors staff in living the life of a professional athlete for a day.

It was a lifetime memory for a team that has shared so much together over the past season.

Aptly-named Trevor's Troops, the Tigers rallied around teammate Jack Thomson and brother Spencer last year after they lost their dad Trevor to cancer. Together, they raised \$1,700 for the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, participating in the Road Hockey to Conquer Cancer tournament in Trevor's memory.

‘Having the opportunity to train like a pro is the ultimate ‘cherry on top’ for the Tigers,’ said Marc Warner, head coach. ‘The coaching staff and I thought this would be a great way to end the season. They all deserve it this year.’

The Novice AA's were finalists in the York-Simcoe championship this season.

They earned the opportunity through online voting on a Ford-run website, set up all winter allowing players, parents and coaches to ask everyone they know to vote for them in the contest. The Tigers finished in the top five in the Novice division in voting to win the trip.

The day in downtown Toronto kicked off with over an hour skating on the ice at the stadium, the same ice used by many of their heroes on the Toronto Maple Leafs.

‘There's a lot of allegiances these days,’ said Warner, whose son Luke plays on the team. ‘Montreal, Pittsburgh, Chicago’but today they're all Leafs fans.’

‘They thought it was so cool’the goalies thought it was so cool to go into the crease.’

On-ice practice was followed by dryland training, as the rambunctious boys took the VIP elevator upstairs to the Raptor's state-of-the-art training facility. There they were subjected to drills faced by the professional athletes that train there, and got a taste of their daily practice.

‘We want to show them exactly how a pro athlete would train, and what it takes to be on top,’ said Mark Gamache, a public

relations consultant running the program.

To top off the experience, the team met with a nutritional expert to learn how to properly fuel their bodies, which Warner said is important even for young athletes.

?It's not just exercising?they need to learn proper nutrition too.?

All in all, it was the smiles on the boys' faces that really wrapped up how important the day was to them.

?In the end, it's not necessarily the hockey they'll remember,? said Warner. ?It's days like this. This is definitely a memory for them that they won't forget.?