

Hockey hopefuls take over Tigers' rookie camp



By Jeff Doner

Looking to take the next step in their hockey careers, 108 hockey players took over the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex for a three day rookie camp last weekend.

Of those 108 players, 44 received an invite to the team's main camp in August - 28 forwards, 14 defencemen and two goalies.

James Richmond, Tiger's General Manager and Head Coach, said the team will be signing 10 or more new players for the 2013-14 season.

Over the three days, each skater played in five games, giving them ample opportunity to show their skills and impress the Tigers' brass.

On Friday night, the team held its goalie camp, where 20 goalies were whittled down to 12 for the rest of the weekend. Then only two would be invited to the main camp.

"Out of this camp we'll take some guys to go to the main camp in August and then from the main camp, we'll pick our team," said Richmond. "Obviously the top end guys out of this camp will get offered a spot with us right away."

With such a high number of participants, Richmond said he saw some great things in this year's camp.

"This was the best quality camp that we've had since I've been here," he said. "Winning attracts people and we won the north this past season, so that could be why we've had so many - this is the most we've ever had."

Assistant coach Thomas Milne was also pleased with the quality of play at the camp.

"We had some real good surprises," he said after the final game on Sunday night. "The veterans next year better come to camp in shape."

The players, mostly coming out of Jr. B and midget, came from as far as the U.S., but there were also a lot of local kids who received an invite to camp.

Aurora players given an invite to camp included forwards Keifer McIntosh, Nick Baxter, Tyler Bruce, John MacDonald and goaltenders Matthew Menna and Quinten Bell.

Richmond said his coaching staff was looking for players with "character, speed and compete level," and, at the camp, they may have found some.

Arran MacDonald, a 17-year-old from Caledon who played with the Toronto Jr. Canadiens this past season, was invited to the main

camp and said he is eager to get going.

?The opportunity is obviously exciting and I'm looking forward to getting into the main camp,? he said.

?I consider myself a hardworking player that likes to get in the corners and do the dirty work. I'm working on my strength right now because I've grown a couple inches.?

He added that he enjoyed playing against a stiffer competition.

?It was good. Just getting out there with some bigger bodies and people are stronger and older. It's good to get the experience.?

Connor Stack, 17, also played his way onto the Tiger's radar and said the competition level at the camp was high.

?It was good, fast-paced hockey. There's a lot of pressure because you want to impress the coaches and everything, but you've just got to come out and compete.?

The self proclaimed playmaker, with quick speed and a high compete level, was clear and concise when asked about his goals.

?Obviously I want to make the team, that's the first goal on my mind and then I want to be an impact player on the team who makes a difference and stands out.?

Another standout was 15-year-old [soon to be 16] forward Jonathan Yaremko from Newmarket. Yaremko played for York-Simcoe Express last year and even though he had a strong showing, admitted the camp pushed his limits.

?It was a good camp, but a little tiring,? he said. ?I just want to try and develop and play a higher pace of hockey. That'll make me a better player and help me get better.?