

PeeWee Tigers play on for Coach Kyle



By Jake Courtepatte

For players, parents, and coaches alike, a packed house at the Aurora Community Centre last Tuesday was a polarizing sight for the Minor PeeWee AE Tigers.

A sea of black, white, and yellow not only came out to support the Tigers in their push towards the York-Simcoe league final, but to come together in solidarity with their brethren who had just lost a mentor.

Kyle Hewitt, who served as an assistant coach with the team, passed away suddenly in early March.

A cornerstone of minor hockey in Aurora, the organization as a whole was rocked by the news, releasing a statement that the AMHA is "lessor in his loss."

Hewitt's passing came just one day after the Tigers clinched a berth in the YSHL semifinals against the Newmarket Redmen, with just under two weeks passing between the news and the next home game.

When they finally returned to the Aurora Community Centre, they realized they were not to go through the process alone. Decked out in their Tigers jerseys, supporters were there to cheer on their hometown team.

"The energy level inside ACC#1 was powerful enough to make the coaches and players feel like they were at the other ACC (home to the Toronto Maple Leafs)," said team trainer Jerome Gaspari. "The cheering, clapping, and spontaneous chants of 'A-U, A-U-R, A-U-R-O-R-A, T-I, T-I-G, T-I-G-E-R-S, GOOOO TIGERS' felt unreal - almost as if the building's roof was ready to lift off. It was one of the largest crowds that ACC#1 has welcomed this season."

The favour was returned to the packed house in the form of a fantastic hockey game, with Hewitt's son, Tyler, scoring to tie the game at one with only five minutes remaining. Though Newmarket eventually won the game 2 - 1, the Tigers have since won two in a row to stake their claim in the YSHL championship series.

While the coaching staff wishes to extend a sincere thank you to the hockey community for their support over the last few weeks, the appreciation goes beyond the ice and bench and into the stands, as players' parents remember Hewitt for his commitment to their sons.

"The boys loved him, the boys respected him," said parent Larry Jacobs. "Kyle was a great role model. He made an impression on my son that will last a lifetime. Throughout the season the boys played hockey for Kyle as their coach, now they are playing hockey 'for Kyle.'"

Rob McConkey, another parent on the team, said the boys were "privileged to spend time with a fine, fun-loving gentleman like Kyle, and I'm sure they all know it."

While appreciated by parents and fellow coaching staff as a strong, positive reinforcement for the kids, Coach Kyle's players remember him as a "happy", "funny", and "cheerful" guy.

"Kyle was a great coach," said Carter Gillies. "He was very funny. He helped me be the player that I am."

"He made hockey fun for our team," added Lucas Gaspari.

Aidan McCartney called Coach Kyle his "favourite coach ever," saying that he tied up his skates "just right." He also remembers Coach Kyle for his infectious humour.

"He always called me tomato face," said McCartney. "Because my face gets really red when I play hockey. If I had one early in the game, he said 'that's how I know you're working hard.'"

The team continues its journey towards a championship this week against the Whitchurch-Stouffville Clippers.