

Two month challenge lands Bantam Tigers on NHL ice



By Jeff Doner

The Aurora Tigers Bantam AA squad is not only having a stellar season, but the team was recently given quite the prize for winning a GTA-wide contest open to all bantam and midget teams.

It was a two-month long contest, but the time and effort paid off when the team was selected to participate in a skills competition and then play in a game at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto on January 6.

The contest consisted of three periods or challenges that the team had to complete. The team came out of the first and second periods on top, which earned them a trip down to the Toronto Maple Leafs' practice arena the Mastercard Centre for a skills competition on December 13.

It was a surreal experience for the boys, said head coach Rob Scott. That in itself was an amazing prize. We were fortunate enough to be one of the top teams to come out of that event, us and a AAA team from Whitby and that got us to the Air Canada Centre.

After coming out of the skills competition as the top bantam team, they thought the main prize was solely a spot in a game against the midget team from Whitby at the ACC, but that's when they learned they would also be invited to a Leafs game against Buffalo on December 27.

The team was looked after in Under Armor's company box and between the second and third periods three players from each team went out on the ice for a mini skills competition.

But all of this was a lead-up to the Leafs for the Day grand prize game against Whitby on January 6.

That day started off with a practice run by former Leafs Brad May and Gary Leeman, which was followed by a trip to the kitchen to meet the Leafs chef for breakfast.

Then it was off to a media training session with mock interviews, a strength and conditioning session for an hour, then back to the kitchen for a snack and nutrition session.

The team was then ushered off to the video room where they saw how all the equipment worked and they even got to see some video of themselves out on the ice.

That was followed by a full tour of the locker rooms and some time with players before the big game against Whitby.

When game time finally approached, they got the exact same treatment as the hometown Leafs.

Leafs TV was on hand for commentary, Andy Frost announced the rosters, the organist was filling the stands with tunes and they even had a singer for the anthem before puck drop.

‘It was everything you would get at a Leaf game?’ it has everything,’ Scott said. ‘The goalie makes a big save, the whistle goes and it’s up on the big screen overhead. They did the three stars after the game. It just blew our mind.’

Dave Bolland was on the bench to help out the Tigers, while sniper Phil Kessel was on the bench with Whitby, but both spent time with the players before and after the game.

It was a bit of a lopsided match for the bantam Tigers going up against a midget AAA team, but they played admirably and it was all smiles throughout.

‘I’ve never coached a game that we lost 4 ? 0, got outshot like we did and watched every single player take their helmet off and smile ear to ear when it was all done,’ Scott recalled. ‘It was just an unbelievable day.’