

SPORTS



Photo submitted

A GOOD WAY TO WRAP UP THE COMPETITIVE SEASON – The Whitehorse Junior Mustangs atom development hockey team recently competed at a tournament in Victoria and went undefeated at 5-0, bringing home the championship trophy.

Junior Mustangs make gold look easy

By **ECHO ROSS**
Star Sports Editor

All season long, Kerry Pettitt and his coaching staff have been preaching the same message to their troops: focus on defence first and then let the offence happen.

This past weekend, the Whitehorse Junior Mustangs atom development hockey team proved they had been listening, with a dominant showing on both ends of the ice at the first annual Victoria Minor Hockey Association Atom Development Tournament.

Limiting their opponents to an average of about eight shots per game, the Junior Mustangs also scored at least five goals per contest, finishing easily atop their pool at 3-0 after the round-robin.

In their semifinal matchup against home-town team Victoria, the goals continued to come for Whitehorse as they skated to a 5-2 victory.

The final against Terrace would prove to be the toughest game of the tournament, but depth was the difference as the Junior Mustangs posted a 5-3 win and picked up the gold medal in the process.

“(Terrace) had lots of players that were fast and had really good moves,” said forward Josh Harlow, in an interview back home Monday. “That was the first team that really put up a good fight against us.”

Defenceman Caleb Millwater, in his first year as a member of the

development team, agreed the last game was the toughest, pointing out Whitehorse and Terrace were the only two undefeated teams in the tournament.

Millwater said the difference in the end may have had something to do with man power.

“They only had 11 players and we skated hard and really made them all work. Our whole team was good.”

Pettitt said the final game was actually fairly even, with Whitehorse holding a small edge in shots on goal, 22-16. He said while the level of competition in Victoria probably wasn't as good as the team had faced in previous competitions the past couple of seasons, Terrace was “right there with us.”

“I think the difference was, with the other teams, there was not quite as much depth,” said Pettitt. “We had three lines and we played all three throughout the tournament. Our first line once again got the majority of the points, but it really was a nice team victory.

“Every line got their fair share. They all worked hard.”

Pettitt said something else he noticed in Victoria was that the Junior Mustangs were ahead in terms of their grasp on puck support. Some of the other teams, he said, really couldn't seem to get it going.

“We were able to be the first man on the puck. We literally dominated. Three fourths of the play in every

game was in the other team's end.”

The defencemen, he added, were making the right pinches at the right time to keep the puck in play.

“We were passing well, made the right decisions and didn't get out of position,” agreed forward Ryan Chippett.

It didn't hurt that both Junior Mustangs' goaltenders, Lane Davignon and Tomas Jirousek, played great. Jirousek is actually a novice player who joined the atom development team this year for the experience.

The backup goalie saw just under two periods of action in Victoria. He also made the trip to Grande Prairie earlier this year and got some ice time.

“His dad just wanted to send him on a trip so he could see what it's all about,” explained Pettitt. “He did great when he played. He's moving up to atom next year and he will probably be the number one goalie.”

Davignon, who is moving up to pee wee next year, was particularly strong in the final against Terrace, as he faced the highest total of shots all tournament.

“Lane stayed on his game and made a lot of really good saves,” said Jared Steinbach, who collected three goals and three assists in the final game, much to the appreciation of his teammates.

“In the gold medal game, Jared came up really big for us,” said Harlow. “If he wouldn't have gotten those goals, we would have lost.”

“He scored a lot of goals and got the most points out of everyone,” added Chippett. “A couple of times, he walked right out of the corner and scored.”

Pettitt said he was impressed with every member of the team, especially considering they only had six returning players on this year's development squad. He said this year's team

may not have been quite as deep as the one last year to start, but they made up for it with their determination throughout the season.

“Hats off to those kids. They worked hard, learned what they needed to learn, and were pretty darn close to where we finished off last year. These guys really improved. The kids that needed to worked hard and brought their game up.”

“At the start of the year, we were a good team. Then by the end of the year, we were an elite team,” stated Harlow.

Other than Jirousek, every member of this year's atom development team will become pee wees next season, and Pettitt is confident they'll be ready for the jump.

“At the atom level, we're just trying to teach sound fundamentals. Once they have the sound fundamentals, they can work with any coach.”

Rams down Crusaders in opener of championship

The Yukon High School Basketball Championships continue this week, with Grade 11/12 boys' and girls' action.

The first round-robin games were held Monday night.

In the varsity boys division, the Porter Creek Rams defeated the Vanier Crusaders 84-76.

The Rams were led by Tim

Beaver with 21 points, Zack Carey with 17 and Sam Johnson with 16.

The Crusaders' Myles Hogen had an outstanding game, hitting five three-pointers on his way to 25 points.

Alejandro Pulido contributed 12 points and strong defence for Vanier.

Round-robin action continues

tonight with Porter Creek hosting F.H. Collins in varsity boys' and girls' basketball.

The boys game starts at 5 p.m. and the girls start at 7 p.m.

Wednesday's games feature Vanier versus F.H. at Porter Creek Secondary School.

The boys start at 5 p.m. while the girls start at 7 p.m.