

## Hockey bridges family bonding: Families from all over the nation come together at Shattuck-St. Mary's camp

By Bobby Hart

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Wes Bolin, an instructor at the Hockey and Sons Camp, leads a group of fathers and sons at the Shattuck-St. Mary's Ice Arena Wednesday. Bolin is the head coach at Woodbury High School. (Bobby Hart/Daily News)

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FARIBAULT — Fathers, mothers, sons and daughters from across the country arrived for Troy Ward's 10th annual Hockey & Sons Skills Camp at Shattuck-St. Mary's Wednesday looking to sharpen more than just skates and hockey skills. Family bonding was the lure of this five-day get-away.

"The uniqueness of this camp is the fact that you spend quality time with your kids," said Ward, the camp director and owner.

Ward, who is the assistant general manager of the Minnesota Wild's American Hockey League affiliate — the Houston Aeros — made sure to emphasize the "quality" in "quality time." Together, parents and their kids hit the ice twice a day, eat three meals a day and bunk together every night in the SSM dorms.

"The thing that your kids take away from this is the experience they had with their dad or their parent — the fact that they roomed together, maybe they went for a walk and held hands, maybe they got hugs every night," said Ward, who has coached summer hockey camps at SSM since 1985.

Kevin Rochford made the trip from Wilmette, Ill., without ever playing a game of hockey in his life. But hockey is his 9-year-old son Colin's passion.

“I’m here because I want to support him and get a better understanding of the game he loves so much,” Kevin said.

But not without getting a hard time from his son. Colin’s favorite part of the camp is watching his dad take a spill.

“When he’s on the ice, you better get the ambulance before he falls,” Colin joked.

The Rochford’s heard good things about the camp through friends in Wilmette, and that’s basically how the camp gets its business. Through word of mouth and a glowing reputation, the camp has blossomed over the last decade from one camp of 38 people, to three sold out camps of approximately 140 people each. After the first camp ends Sunday, the second one begins August 2, and the final one starts August 6.

Ward said there’s a 65-to-70 percent return rate at his camp.

Kurt Overhardt and his 11-year-old son, Alex, were sharing their fourth camp together, after making the trip from Denver, Col.

“Everyone that comes here comes with a common purpose,” said Overhardt, who works as an NHL agent. “You come here just to relax, have a great time with your son, laugh and you don’t take things too seriously. You learn a little bit and just get to be with good people.”



The camp had its share of high profile hockey names in attendance. Kevin Constantine, current head coach of the Houston Aeros and former NHL coach of the Pittsburgh Penguins, San Jose Sharks and New Jersey Devils, is an instructor. Tom Lynn, the assistant general manager of the Minnesota Wild, is attending the camp with his son. The camp has also had the luxury of having former Shattuck stars and current pro players such as Zach Parise, Drew Stafford and Ben and Pat Eaves bring their experience to the camp over the years. Big name NHL players like Hall-of-Famer Joe Mullen and Ruslan Fedotenko, currently with the New York Islanders, have also been involved in the past.

But at the Hockey & Sons Skills Camp, it’s not about the quality names, players or talent that makes it special; it’s the quality time.

“That’s the brunt of why they’re here,” Ward said. “It’s to enjoy the overall experience of being together as a parent and child. I always have to bring that to the focal point.”

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