



Hockey Is For Everyone At America's Camp

By Brian Mullen

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I recently had the opportunity to travel to the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts to host a hockey clinic for youngsters at America's Camp. From Aug. 18-25, more than 300 children between the ages of 8-13 who lost a parent in the attack on the World Trade Center attended a free one-week sleep-away camp at Camp Mah-Kee-Nac.

On Aug. 20, I visited the camp with New York Giants legend Harry Carson and Jim Bouton, a former pitcher with the New York Yankees. We were greeted by the smiling faces of campers and counselors who eagerly encouraged us to share our experiences as professional athletes. I described growing up in New York City, where I learned how to play hockey on traditional roller skates before ever stepping onto the ice. Following a successful ice hockey career at the University of Wisconsin, I was drafted into the NHL by the Winnipeg Jets. After five years with the Jets, I was traded to the Rangers, where I had served as stick boy during the mid-1970s. After four years in New York, I played one season with the San Jose Sharks and my final season with the New York Islanders. The children, many of whom were Rangers or Islanders fans, excitedly asked for my autograph when I finished talking.



Following our introductions, 50 kids joined me outside to begin the hockey clinic. With Harry and Jim's assistance, I demonstrated the basics of

stickhandling, passing and shooting. I was delighted to see that both boys and girls, some who play in hometown hockey leagues, and some who had never picked up a stick, chose to participate. Although everyone was excited to show off their skills, the girls in the group, especially 10-year-old Frankie, took the lead. She followed my every move, making sure she perfected her skills by the end of the clinic. As I was leaving, she ran up to me to ask if I wanted to join her group for water skiing. It's those moments when I'm most proud to share the game that I love with youngsters.

Following the hockey clinic, Harry, Jim and I took turns pitching during the camp softball game and teaching the kids how to throw a football. The counselors did a terrific job motivating the campers to join in and have fun. It was so touching to see all the kids together, singing along with the counselors and cheering for each other. During the week, the campers also learned how to sail, windsurf and water ski on the nearby lake, swam in the heated pool, made creative projects in the art and wood studios and participated in dance, gymnastics and theater arts. It was a rewarding experience to watch the campers make new friends and share happy times in such a supportive environment.

At the end of the day, the campers and counselors gathered in the gymnasium for a pep rally. It was evident everyone present had truly enjoyed themselves. My goal for the day was to forge a bond with the kids through the game of hockey. Even though I only was a part of their lives for one day, I was able to help take their minds off the grief they have felt during the past year. As a lifelong New Yorker, I wanted to help honor the men and women who gave their lives when the World Trade Center was attacked. In addition to visiting America's Camp, I've participated in several hockey games with fellow NHL alumni to compete against teams from the NYPD, FDNY and the PAPD, all to benefit charities associated with September 11.