

Jr. A's preach Respect thanks to Osum

by Michael Drader
Bonnyville

Even with their demanding schedule on the ice, one mandate of the 2008-09 Bonnyville Jr. "A" Pontiacs has been to get more involved in the community. From manning intersections on Halloween to providing goaltending clinics, this year's squad has worked hard to show fans that their support over the last 18 seasons has been appreciated.

In co-operation with Osum Oil Sands Corporation, players from the Pontiacs roster entered a different arena this year: the classroom.

During the last two months of the 2008-09 Alberta Junior Hockey League regular season, students in Cold Lake and Bonnyville were the recipients of messages from the Pontiacs. Respect: It's The Name Of The Game is a 30-minute presentation addressing the importance of treating everybody with dignity.

"It's a great cause to get out and put into kid's minds that respect is huge in this kind of environment," said Pontiacs' team captain Craig Cuthbert.

Cuthbert was one of the main presenters, along with teammates Ashton Hewson, Kirk Belyk, and Beau Bertagnolli.

In developing the presentation for the schools, both Pontiacs business manager Janice Sabatier and head coach Chad Mercier approached Osum for sponsorship. Osum, looking for initiatives that fit into its community investment mandate, was intrigued by the proposal and investigated the possibility.

Justin Robinson, manager of communications with Osum, said in face-to-face meetings with both Mercier and some of the players, the company was impressed with the professionalism of the team. As a result, it was something Osum wanted to support.

"They're 20 year olds, well-known, and have respect in the community," said Robinson.

According to Robinson, the initiative developed by the Pontiacs fit well into "the four buckets": science & technology, vibrant communities, environment, and sports. Since Osum will be spending the next 30 years in the area with its Taiga project, a program like Respect made for an ideal investment into the community.

Robinson also said studies confirm that kids who are involved in sports achieve success later in life.

"Sometimes things get rough on the ice, but there is a respect that players treat each other with," said Robinson. "[This] teaches [kids] about the essential personal qualities that it takes to be successful in sports and in life."

The 30-minute presentation includes a slideshow,



Photo by Michael Drader

■ CAPTAIN PREACHES RESPECT - During a presentation at Ardmore school, Bonnyville Jr. "A" Pontiacs' team captain Craig Cuthbert talks about the groups of people that kids frequently interact with, and compares it to the same groups that a hockey team associates with.

personal examples of respect, and a few minutes for questions and answers. The Pontiacs discuss the many groups students are involved, from a classroom to a sports team. Regardless of the group, the players always return to showing respect to others, even if others are not likable.

"When I was a kid growing up, I looked up to hockey players," said Cuthbert. "Kids look up to us in a way, and if you can relate bullying to hockey and sports, the message hits home."

Teachers from the schools that have seen the presentation

have shown their support for the program. Monique Sundlie, school counsellor from Cold Lake Elementary School, said the program fits together with the school's conflict resolution program: Kelso's Choices.

"We're going to meet a lot of people throughout our lifetime, and you're not always going to get along with everybody," said Robinson. "But learning to respect those you disagree with benefits society as a whole."

Respect: It's The Name Of The Game will continue to run until the end of the Pontiacs' spring camp in April, after which the team disbands until August.

There's huge potential above ground, too.

As a good neighbour with strong Alberta roots, we're committed to helping children and youth realize their potential in any way we can. Our communities do a lot of incredible things that we're proud to support – from music festivals and minor hockey to art and literacy programs. For more information on the investments we're making in your local community, visit osumcorp.com

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