

IHF Alumni Return Home to Compete in WCRHL All-Star Action

Shift Happens

by Jay Piz
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Irvine, California -- Thirteen former IHF high school league standouts returned home to compete in the WCRHL All-Star Weekend held at the 949 Roller Hockey Center this past weekend seeing action in collegiate division matchups and high-scoring All-Star games.

Returning IHF alums include Division I All Stars Captain Ryan Burrows of Esperanza high school, goalie Jeff Aoki of Fountain Valley, and Josh Hackworth of Los Alamitos high school, all of whom represent Long Beach State, and Sam Robinson of Marina high representing Cal State Berkeley. IHF alumnus also included former Esperanza high teammates Justin Barney, Greg Davis, and Andy Huynh of Long Beach State; Huntington Beach high school's Bryce Courtney and Devon Thormodsgaard of Long Beach State; Los Alamitos' Josh Hackworth of Long Beach State; Tesoro high's Doug Dunbar and Jay Schoen of UC Santa Barbara and San Clemente high school brothers Brett and Kevin Middlekauf of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Vying for playoff spots for their respective teams in Divisions 1, 2 and B as their regular season draws to a close this next weekend, it was the All-Star games held on Saturday afternoon that placed the spotlight on the league's most talented players. And the All-Stars went out there to have fun and to put on a show for family, friends and fans watching in the stands.

The Division II/B All-Star Game saw 15 goals scored on a total of 60 shots. 3 of those 15 goals were scored by goalkeepers, who skated on the wing, received passes in the middle of the slot, stickhandled and shot past their rival netminders. The crowd was definitely into the theatrics on the rink. This game had goaltenders changing on the fly with the opposition rushing down on them in a rain of shots. Brendan Welch of (Univ. of San Diego) led all scoring with 2 goals and 5 assists. Erick Rivas (Cal Poly Pomona) finished with 2 goals and 1 assist. Leading the Dark team was goaltender Elie Tawil (USC) with 2 goals. Justin Hannah (UC Santa Barbara) also finished with 2 goals for the Light team. 7 other players contributed, scoring 1 goal each, including goaltender Adrian Gonzalez (Cal Poly Pomona).

The Division I All-Star game was a lot less goalie-friendly. These skilled players scored 19 goals on 59 shots. Shawn Pearson (UNLV) led all scoring with 3 goals, and Charlie Middleton (UC Irvine), Mike Tasch (UC Irvine) and Josh Hackworth (Long Beach State) all finished with 3 points as well. The fans saw goaltender Kevin Leonard (UC Irvine) deking through his opposition, Ryan Burrows (Long Beach State) picking the puck up with his stick and lifting it over the goaltender's left shoulder for 1 of his 2 goals, and 8 other players getting 2-point games.

The level of competition, sportsmanship and skills were dazzling. "This game was definitely a 1-hour highlight reel," said Edwards.



IHF alum All Stars includes Ryan Burrows, Jeff Aoki, and Josh Hackworth representing Long Beach State, and Sam Robinson representing Cal State Berkeley. (click picture to enlarge)

Evident also was the family following for many of the athletes and even the fan base for some teams. Moms and dads, siblings and grandparents filled the stands to greet and cheer their collegians return. It was heartwarming to see parents and their now adult offspring still active together as though they were whisked back to some Saturday morning youth level game of yesteryear.

Jay Schoen and Doug Dunbar, teammates on the Tesoro high school hockey club and now the UC Santa Barbara team, were spending time with family in between games and glad to be home even if only for the weekend. Dunbar, former Captain of the Tesoro club, stood bashfully still for a rare picture with mom Chris and father Dan.

"It's fun to come watch him skate and nice to have him home. Hearing the cabinets and refrigerator door in the kitchen at all hours is like the old days and I don't mind how much he eats," says Chris.

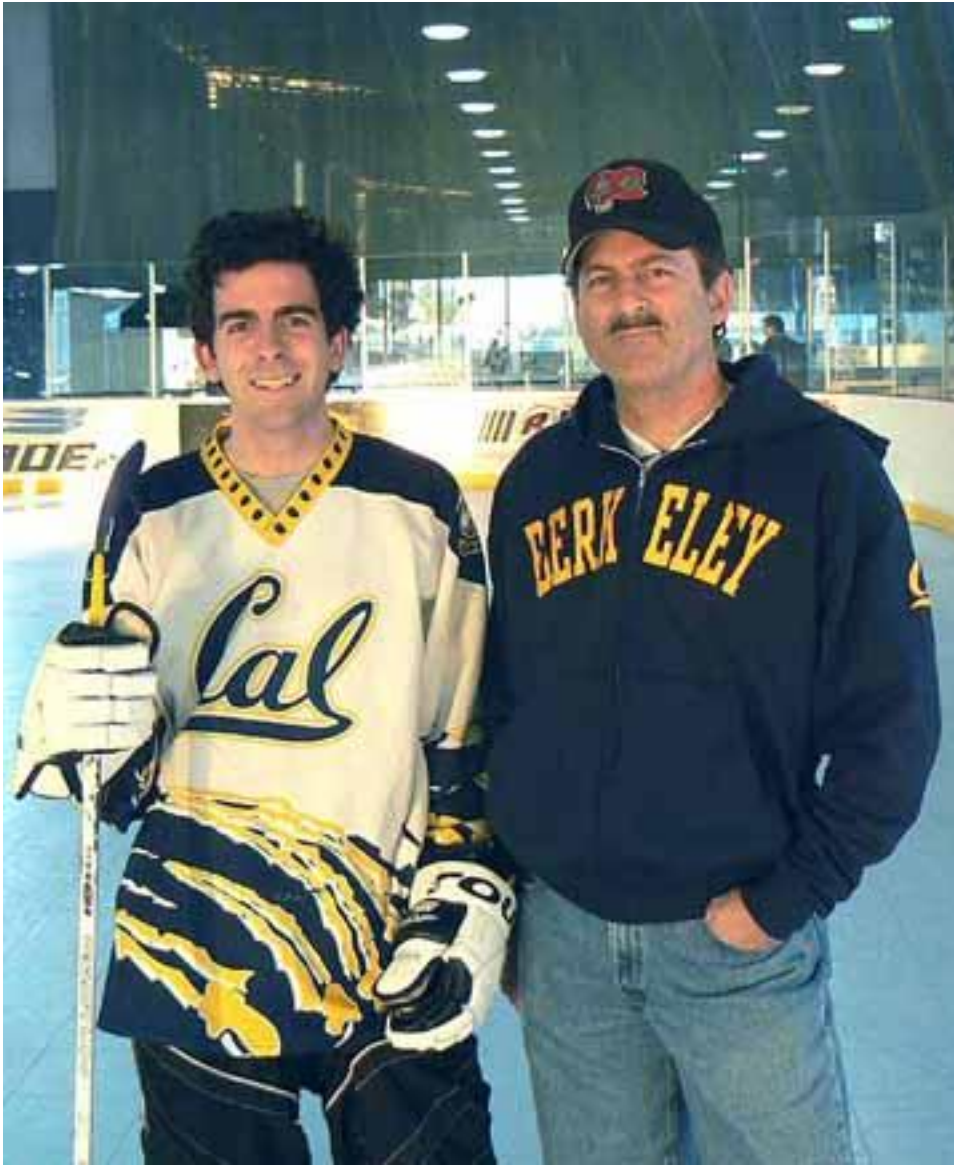


The Dunbar family: father Dan, Doug and mom Chris.

Mike Robinson, a Director with the IHF high school league, seldom has opportunity to travel to the San Francisco area to watch son Sam and the Cal State Golden Bears team. "I only get to see the local games," he says.

"But when the team has tournaments and games in the Los Angeles area, I am definitely there," said Robinson.

The younger Robinson was on the 2006 AAU Varsity National Champions team and the IHF Varsity Champion teams in 2006 and 2007 representing Marina high school in Huntington Beach, CA. Sam, who devotes the majority of his time to school as an Engineering major, looks forward to his younger brother graduating to the high school ranks this next year.



IHF Director Mike Robinson poses with son Sam in Cal State Berkeley colors

"It's great to see parents and players continue from one level to the next," said Long Beach State head coach Bill Burrows.

Burrows' son Ryan is the Captain of the Long Beach State team. Speaking on the importance of the high school leagues developing talent for collegiate level play, "I have three IHF high school players already committed to my team this next year," says Burrows.

These IHF alumni will meet again on March 1-2 as their regular season concludes and they compete in the WCRHL Regional Championship Tournament back again at the 949 Roller Hockey Center.

The WCRHL and its athletes will also be giving back to the sport and the community for a first at this event by hosting a free youth roller hockey clinic, aptly titled the "Mission Hockey College" on Saturday. Enthusiastic for opportunities to help build the sport, WCRHL's Edwards says that local collegiate players will instruct new youth players in a fun environment and are capable of instructing up to 50 kids per rink on all three rinks. "We would like to make it the biggest youth clinic that we have done nationally," says Edwards.

Clearly these college athletes are truly growing to become ambassadors of the sport. One day soon it will be they who are the one's bringing their sons and daughters to the rink and cheering them on as the next generation of roller hockey comes of age.

Shift happens!

Established in 2003 and headquartered in Torrance, California, the Western Collegiate Roller Hockey League (WCRHL www.wcrhl.com) is a conference of the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association (NCRHA). With over nearly 200 teams and 2,500 players nationwide, the NCRHA is the governing body of collegiate roller hockey in the United States.

Established in 1998 in Orange County, California, the Interscholastic Hockey Federation (IHF www.ihf-hockey.org) organization proudly serves nearly 700 student athletes from 29 high school clubs and 56 teams in four skill divisions in its current 2007-08 season. Participating IHF high school clubs also include the 2006 and 2007 AAU Varsity National Champions.