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## A CUP OF PRIDE

The California State Cup High School Roller Hockey Championships showcased great skill,

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For three days, high school inline teams representing four scholastic leagues from California battled it out on the rinks of Irvine's 949 Roller Hockey Center for pride and their shot at the Cup in the 14th annual California State Cup High School Roller Hockey Championships.

"We almost lost this tournament altogether two years ago," said scholastic host Jay Piz of the IHF (Interscholastic Hockey Federation). "But now the Cup is back and we're rebuilding the program to give the scholastic teams in the state an opportunity to compete and help bond this important segment of our sport."

Piz cited his recent online meeting with Mike "Big Mike" Muckenthaler, who helped fill in the blanks for some history behind this event, dating back to 1995. Back then, the California Street Hockey Association (CSHA) High School League held the first championship games at the Pond in Anaheim, just before a Roller Hockey International game between the Anaheim Bullfrogs and the Oklahoma Coyotes. The games were held there again in 1996. "Big Mike" was also the feature source to Mike Horelick, who wrote an article, entitled "Prep Course," in the March '96 issue of *Roller Hockey* magazine. Since then, the tournament has been operated by several different promoters until this year when it re-branded and organized by the IHF and sanctioned by the Amateur Athletic Union. The IHF traces its roots back to just after the opening of the then Wayne Gretzky Roller Hockey Center in 1996 (which is now know as the 949 Roller Hockey Center).



The 2009 version of the Cup saw Friday night round-robin competition begin mostly among area varsity teams, giving the teams traveling into the area time to commute to Irvine. But by Saturday morning, the action was heating up almost as fast the southern California sun, with temperatures into the high 80's. Teams squared off in two Junior Varsity divisions and Varsity as they vied for the Cup.

In a festive break from the Saturday competition, the evening was reserved for the IHF's second annual All-Star event. Emceed by the IHF's director Jay Piz, the All-Stars were first showcased by a Special Achiever's Award program sponsored by the Anaheim Ducks and their Executive Vice President and GM Bob Murray, focusing on student athletes who excelled in academics as well as community spirit.

In another special celebration, the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association's Brennan Edwards was on hand to make the trophy award to the Saddleback Gauchos for their recent Junior College national title accomplishment. The Gauchos' roster includes a long list of IHF alums, which provided motivation for those graduating high school student athletes to move on to collegiate roller hockey action. The All-Star event featured two games: the Mascot Cup; comprised of one star player from every Junior Varsity club; and the marquee Varsity All-Star game. Both games were run as 12-minute, stop-clock periods, and all infractions resulted in a penalty shot. With two periods for the JV and three for the Varsity, the JV game ended in a tie and the first-ever shoot-out in IHF history. It was among the many highlights for the hundreds in attendance.

State Cup competition was on Sunday's breakfast menu as round-robin competition began winding down and seeds for the playoff rounds were being decided. Styles of play being different meant new challenges and learning experiences for many players at all skill levels.

"The way some of these IHF teams set their umbrella to the side and make two and three cross passes in front of the net is different than the style we see in our [San Diego CIF Metro] league," said Mike Kurth, head varsity coach of the Westview Wolverines who were this year's CIF champions. "We're learning a lot about the game and about the competition."

But some styles remain classics, such as in the case of the Central Coast High School League team from San Luis Obispo who were strong, straightforward and among the most sportsmanlike of teams throughout the tournament. After meeting head coach Joe Long and his two coach sons, Bart and Eric, it was easy to understand why.

"We came in for the fun and to compete at our best. We're like family and we coach and play for fun," says Long. "And now that the event has been re-established, I am sure that more teams will come next year."

The run for the Cup narrowed eventually to the finals in each of three divisions. The Junior Varsity 2 (JV2) matched IHF league teams the Santiago Sharks with the Villa Park Spartans in a close contest that saw the Sharks pull out a 4-2 victory for their State Cup. The Junior Varsity 1 (JV1) division again pitted IHF competitors, matching the top-seeded Griffins of Los Alamitos with the Mustangs from Trabuco Hills in a hotly contested battle for two 15-minute periods. The Griffins moved ahead in the third to win their State Cup, 7-4.

The Varsity match had storybook makings when the top two seeds met for their contest. Top seeded and reigning IHF League champions, the Marina Vikings of Huntington Beach, collided with the number-two seed and CIF Metro League champions, the Westview Wolverines from San Diego. Having met hours earlier in the last round-robin game, the highly skilled, fast-skating Wolverines came in fired up ready for the Vikings. As time ticked away on

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the game clock, the Wolverines got a quick education as the former AAU National Champion Viking team skated, passed and scored to take command of the game and secure the Varsity State Cup with a 5-1 victory.

"It was huge to see the thrill of competition and participate with so many kids, coaches and hockey families over the weekend," said Piz. "I owe a great deal to the many volunteers who helped, and 949 host Eddie Limbaga for his support to make this year's event a success. We're already making plans for some of these teams to attend the AAU High School Nationals in May and for our event next year. And as some of these kids graduate this year, we look forward to seeing their names on collegiate hockey rosters as they stick to the sport. After all, it's about the kids."

For more information about the IHF, please visit their website at [www.ihf-hockey.org](http://www.ihf-hockey.org) and their State Cup site at [www.statecuphockey.com](http://www.statecuphockey.com). Information about the upcoming AAU High School Nationals is also available online by visiting [www.aauhockey.org/HighSchoolLeagues/tabid/59/Default.aspx](http://www.aauhockey.org/HighSchoolLeagues/tabid/59/Default.aspx).

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