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Matt DiGiramo, Jody Brown, Keva Boughner, Nielsson Arcibal, Jaynee Eshbaugh, Kandy Stevens
photo by Chris Johnson

of the teachers have had an influence on these players who are now moving on to universities such as Notre Dame, Cornell, Brown, and University of Alabama-Huntsville. It's impressive to say the least. Often these players commit as much drive and determination toward their education as they do the puck. The Tornado "family" has a lot to be proud of. That family consists of the team, host families, players and numerous teachers at both FHS and Collin.

The team's head coach, Tony Curtale, and assistant coach, Tom Murphy, reflect a strong mentoring role that pertains to both hockey and education. Assistant

Tom Murphy holds a degree in education and is an invaluable resource. Coach Curtale reviews report cards, takes calls from the school, matches older players with younger players for tutoring, and sets strong expectations for the student players, including wearing a shirt and tie on game days. Anytime a student is late or absent, the school calls the coach. One player lost the privilege of practicing with the team one day because he left school a little early. The player took it in stride with a positive attitude and has not been a repeat offender.

The team's mission is to serve as an instructional league and to mold character as well as develop life skills for wherever the players' futures lie. Most will play collegiate or professional hockey while still others will serve (as some have) within their communities as doctors, lawyers, and coaches. Coach Curtale considers himself blessed by the experience he has with players. He has had numerous opportunities to influence not just games, but young lives.

The Focused Eye of the Tornado

By Cynthia Howe

"A TORNADO is defined as a violently rotating column of air, circulating around the eye (which is calm), extending from a thunderstorm to the ground."

No one can tell the destination of a Tornado, but they know it's going somewhere, following the eye, and with a profusion of energy. Similarly, the players on Frisco's own Junior "A" League Hockey Team, The Tornado, have the same tenacity and energy as they press on toward their dreams. They come from all over the nation, ranging in age from 17 to 20. They all have the same goals in mind: win another national championship; play collegiate level hockey; and then play pro.

The team itself boasts of having won the Junior "A" League National Championship two years in a row, and are pressing to win it again this year. They have the nicest facilities of any Junior "A" league team in the country, and an average attendance of 3,300 per game. While the team is strong throughout the Junior "A" hockey world, its greatest strength lies in the character of its players. A quarter of the team

attends Frisco High School (FHS), while the majority of the balance attends Collin County Community College District (Collin).

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Some teachers may resent the time practices and games take away from homework and class participation. However, this frustration is not apparent at FHS, as teachers instruct a number of Tornado players during the day, and cheer them on during the weekends.

And they have a lot to cheer about. Many

While Tornado players leave their families far away, they have a new home here in Frisco. The team carefully selects host families to serve the players. They have also arranged with the school to have all the players at the same high school campus. Families, like the Moses family, open their homes to the players and become part of the supportive fabric of that player. John and Patty Moses find the kids to be an enrichment to their home. “The Tornado family is a close knit family, and the kids have a sense of team that really does something for their overall character,” said Mrs. Moses.

The ultimate long-term goal for each of these players is to eventually play for a professional team, as many former Tornado players have done. Former Tornado Al Montoya plays for the New York Rangers and Matt Nickerson plays for the Dallas Stars. While they reached their ultimate goal, current Tornado players are focused on attending universities.

Brett Blatchford hails from Temperance, Michigan. He has played with the Tornado for the past three years, having served as team captain for the past two. He graduated from FHS last year and will leave the Tornado in the spring to play for the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame. Keva Boughner, a former teacher, described Brett as mature beyond his years. “He always knew what his grade was, exceptionally bright, and he has a way with young fans, including my own kids,” stated Ms. Boughner.

The Tornado family is a close knit family, and the kids have a sense of team that really does something for their overall character.

Nielsson “Archie” Arcibal comes to the Tornado from California. His teachers describe him as personable, handsome, bright and very talented with a great attitude. He reports that one “different” thing that happened at school was a teacher/fan brought him a jersey to



Patty and John Moses with Tornado Dylan Cooper

photo by Chris Johnson

autograph. He values his education and said, “No matter how good you are, you’ll need an education because one day, it could all be over.”

The “baby” of the Tornado family is Pennsylvanian Matt DiGirolamo, a junior at FHS. While his eye is on helping bring the Tornado to their third straight National Championship, his long-term goal is to attend Harvard. He has already spoken to the coach at Harvard in preparation. His teachers are impressed by how well organized he is. He brings as much homework as he can when they hit the road, and makes up anything missed when he gets back. He advises other athletes to keep their schoolwork in line. “Some players don’t do that and they’re going to struggle,” warned Matt.

Tom Train was in high school when he began playing with the Tornado. In the spring he is off to play for the University of Alabama-Huntsville. When he first arrived at FHS, he found it difficult to balance schoolwork with hockey. However, as teachers came along side him and became part of the “team,” he was successful on and off the ice. This taught him an invaluable life lesson. As he said, “Never be satisfied – always want more.”

Dave McKee, a former goaltender for

the Tornado, currently plays for Cornell University. He shattered all of Cornell’s previous goaltending records in his first two years. He was named NCAA Division I All American Athlete and was a runner-up for the prestigious and coveted Hobey Baker Award.

This unique group of young men serves our community as distinct role models. There is a crowd of young people after every game waiting to meet their hockey heroes. Here is some of their sage advice for aspiring student athletes:

You have to put school first. “Friend-time” can really end up hurting you. – Dylan Cooper

All through high school, do what you’re supposed to do. It really does matter. – Karl Sellan

Do whatever you’re passionate about, what you dream. Don’t settle. – Tommy Brooks

It is inspiring to find a group of young men, determined to reach a goal, set on their dreams, creating a path toward their future. They put forth a great amount of energy and synergy toward their destiny – that destiny, as individual to each as their character, is set in the eye of their own lives, their own personal tornado.

Cynthia Howe is a freelance writer living in Little Elm.