

(From the Langley Times)

Warriors tops in North America

Aug 05 2007

Standing in virtual darkness, each player waiting to hear their name bellowed out by an announcer who sounds a lot like James Earl Jones, skating onto the ice on cue and over to the bench with the help of a spotlight with the crowd roaring its approval.

That is what two teams of local hockey players experienced in Estero, Fla.

The West Coast Warriors sent multiple teams to the 7,000-seat Germain Arena in Florida to compete in the largest, most competitive roller hockey tournament in the world, the North American roller hockey championship (NARCh).

The Warriors are strictly a tournament team made up of players from around the Lower Mainland, and practice out of the Walnut Grove Sportsplex.

And they showed they belonged on the biggest stage, capturing two separate titles.

The 98 Warriors, a team of eight and nine-year-olds, knocked off the St. Louis Cobras 4-2 for the right to call themselves tops in North America. The Cobras — who defeated the Warriors in the 2005 championship game — were the lone team to beat West Coast during the round robin.

Prior to the game, the Warriors coaching staff delivered the common cliché: "It is not how good you are, it is how bad you want it." And the team showed how badly they wanted the championship, coming out as the aggressor and getting on the offensive immediately.

Moving the puck well, the Warriors showed patience to look for their scoring opportunities instead of playing a run'n'gun style. And defensively, the team came to play as well, giving the Cobras limited space to operate offensively.

In the team's other games, they had gone 2-1 in the round robin.

They opened with a narrow 4-3 win over the Florida All-Stars, as the Warriors struggled to adjust to the three-hour time change.

Game two saw the Warriors dominate Detroit RBK 8-5, before they closed out the round robin with a 7-4 defeat at the hands of the Cobras. Both teams played hard and physical in that contest, and while the Warriors limited the scoring chances of their opponents, St. Louis was masterful at capitalizing on the few chances they did have.

The semifinal game was a repeat of the Warriors first contest against Florida. Right from the first face-off, the Warriors got to work and controlled much of the play, delivering a 7-2 victory.

In addition to the gold medal, six of the team's players were chosen to represent Team West in the all-star game. Dennis Cholowsky, Cole Gaytmenn, Ryan Klimek, Brady Morton, Baylee Wright and goaltender Luke Gingras helped defeat Team East 3-2.

Several Warriors players also shone during the skills competition. Cholowsky defended the fastest skater title he picked up in 2005, defeating teammate Cameron Obcena.

Two Warriors players also battled it out for the top shooter, as after a lengthy elimination round, it came down to Gaytmenn and Wright. Wright prevailed after Gaytmenn narrowly missed with a jazzy "shake and bake" move.

And finally, Gingrass sewed up the top goalie award in the skills competition which was stopped once three quarters of the way through the competition when it was determined that no other netminder could catch him in points. Gingras was aggressive, using a great poke-check and charging out of the net to disrupt the shooters.

The team's other two players, Kaelen Anderson and Chris Lowe, both also had good tournaments. In the championship game, Anderson, a forward, was effective in neutralizing one of the Cobras top defenceman. Lowe had a goal called back after his shot crossed the line just after the buzzer sounded.