

Hollywood ice folly?

Movie focus hits, misses junior hockey life

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Rob Lowe could only act out on film what some area hockey players live out every day in Canadian junior hockey circles.

The five-hour bus rides, the loneliness of being away from home, and to a lesser extent, the violence portrayed in the movie "Youngblood" is a true story for Mike Hartman, Mike Vellucci, Doug Strombach, Adam Burt and Scott Green.

The Ontario Hockey League (OHL), a fertile ground for NHL talent, has its rosters dotted with U.S. teenagers playing in such places as Belleville, North Bay and Sault Ste. Marie.

It's a fast-skating and hard-checking circuit where the bottom line is to make it to the NHL.

VELLUCCI, A DEFENSEMAN from Farmington who plays with the Belleville Bulls, viewed "Youngblood." In part, he said the movie captures the essence of what playing junior hockey in Canada is all about.

"It is except for the fighting, which in the movie makes the World Wrestling Federation look pacifistic in comparison.

"In ways (it's the same), especially coming into play and the initiations," said Vellucci, who's a friend and former teammate of Toronto Maple Leaf Al Iafraite at Belleville. "The fighting, though they say that's the way it was in the old days, is not realistic. I haven't seen any of it."

The movie "Youngblood," which is playing at local theaters, centers around an American (played by Rob Lowe) who plays for a junior team in Canada. He finds out being a talented player isn't enough. A good right hook is a necessary tool also.

The non-fictional players admit fighting is a fact of life in the OHL. Especially if a player is to survive in the early going.

FOR HARTMAN, from West Bloomfield and a member of the North Bay Centennials, quick fists could provide an avenue to the NHL. Last year, though available, he was passed up in the NHL amateur draft.

Hartman, who has played two seasons in the OHL, stands 5-foot-11 and weighs 180 pounds — not gigantic by pro standards.

After the personable right winger was traded from Belleville to North Bay in October, Centennials coach Bert Templeton wanted Hartman to be more of "a grinder." Before, he was a finesse player.

He now leads the team in penalty minutes (160) and has tangled with the likes of Shayne Corson and Scott Metcalfe, both highly rated juniors. Corson is property of the Montreal Canadiens.

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— Mike Vellucci
Farmington native



count, which the player can't touch until the end of the season.

Half-a-week's pay is a stiff penalty for playing hokey. Yet, a couple of players voiced some concern about teammates whose only interest is the NHL.

"Most of the guys want to make it a career," said Vellucci. "Some of them are already making it a career because they've signed with NHL teams."

Vellucci went to training camp with the Hartford Whalers last September but was sent back to Belleville. The 6-foot defenseman, who was in the car when Iafraite had a notable accident a while back, leads the Bulls in points for a defenseman with 34. He has nine goals and 25 assists.

ANOTHER PLAYER to get a crack at the pros was Strombach, a Redford resident and right winger with North Bay. Strombach, 18, was drafted by the Washington Capitals in the sixth round last year.

Skating in training camp with the likes of Rod Langway was an eye-opening experience.

"It was kind of weird," said Strombach, who has 22 goals and 26 assists for 48 points this season. "You dream about something like this all your life. You're kind of scared and intimidated at first. Then a few days later, you're all right."

Somewhat scared and intimidated is how most of them arrive in Canada. Every player reported homesickness at first.

But they all seem to have adapted to the environment. Canadianization has set in as some punctuate their sentences with the familiar "eh." One player "cuts" in his spare time.

"They razz you once in awhile," said Strombach, referring to his Canadian teammates, who hail from such places as Thunder Bay and Prince Edward Island. "They call you 'Captain America' or 'Mr. America.' It's nothing serious, though."

With no professional hockey in Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay and Belleville, the players have attained celebrity status. OHL games are regularly shown on television.

None of them expressed regrets taking the junior route compared to playing at college.

"That's the hardest part — leaving," said Strombach. "But you have to give up something to get something."



Skiiing for life

Heidi Apol of Farmington Hills won the junior division of the novice heat for females in the Blue Cross-Blue Shield cross country ski race "Ski For Health." Daniel Harrison, also of Farmington Hills, won the grand-prize drawing of an all-expenses paid weekend trip to Toronto.

CC wins on district mats

Continued from Page 1

was pinned in 3:22 by Livonia Church-Hill's Salem Yafai, who remained unbeaten.

"They (McNaughton and Dameron) met twice last year and McNaughton won them both," Krueger said. "McNaughton is real tough. Dave can't make mistakes and expect to beat him. He's going to have to wrestle his best match."

*Out of our eight kids (regional qual-

fers) I think they all have a shot at the state meet," Krueger said. Other regional champions from Overland included Dan Schimansky of Westland John Glenn at 145 and Dan Parilo of Farmington at 198.

Parilo had to come from behind in his final against Huron's David Jones, winning 6-4.

The Class A state meet is Saturday, March 1, at Grand Valley State College in Allendale.

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