

Breakfast Club from page B1

sons became interested in hockey.

Becoming a better coach was the motivation for McDermott, who is currently the head coach of his son's Pee Wee Double A travel team.

"It's helped me immensely," said McDermott, a dentist with a practice in Farmington Hills who is in his fifth year with the Breakfast Club.

"I figured, heck, if I was going to be at the rink all the time, I didn't want to just go there. I wanted to be involved, and I wanted to do the right thing."

Stern, a lawyer, thought about getting back into the game as a player, too, and wanted to re-familiarize himself with the basics in a way that would make it challenging and fun.

He and McDermott have high regard for instructors Lyle Phair, Tom Anastas, Doug Garbarz, Jesse Hubenschmidt, Ray Dries and Rick Fernandez and the quality of their program.

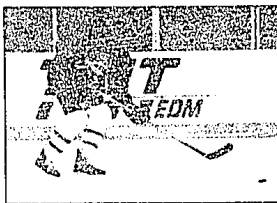
"By the time you're done with these guys, you're mentally and physically exhausted, but there's nothing like that hour and a half in the morning," Stern said.

"You don't have a care in the world except 'Can I connect with the next pass? Can I score on the next scoring opportunity?'"

Stern has been in the club as long as McDermott, "and every year it has gotten a little better, more challenging," he said.

You're dealing with professionals who've played this game at the highest level and know how to impart to others with much less skill what the fundamentals are. To me that's the mark of a great instructor."

Besides learning the right way



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HENNINGSON

too time: Ken Stern makes the next pass during a session of the Breakfast Club at the Suburban Training Center rink in Farmington Hills.

relieves the monotony of just running other days. "It breaks up the routine. You're still burning a lot of energy, but you're not doing the same thing."

While it might be hard for most people to pop out of bed on a cold, winter morning — to say nothing of going directly to the rink for a vigorous workout — club participants don't mind the early start. The time is 6-7:30 a.m. Wednesday and 7-8:30 a.m. Thursday.

"It's a little difficult in the winter, but knowing you're going to be on the ice, having a blast in 15 or 20 minutes makes it a little more palatable," Stern said.

"This is all about fun."

"I'm used to getting up and running early in the morning," said Sandvik, who had a long day last Wednesday when she had a 10:45 p.m. game in Fraser.

"I was at the rink and on the ice by 6 a.m. and had to be ready to play at 11 o'clock at night. It's the only time I could do it, so I don't mind getting up that one day for it."

Once involved in the program, most of the participants are hooked.

"Year to year it seems the same group tends to keep coming back," McDermott said. "That attests to the success of the program and how valuable some guys think it is."

For more information on the Breakfast Club and other programs offered by Suburban Hockey Schools, call (248) 478-1600.



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HENNINGSON

Whalers game: Jamie Lalonde (14) battles with Sting defenseman Kelly Paddon behind the Sarnia net.

Whalers from page B1

as high as last year's team that won 52 games, or other teams I've coached in the past," admitted Plymouth coach Pete DeBoer. "This team wins with effort and character. They never take a night off. Never."

"Tonight was the story of our season: A fourth-line winger scores a goal in the third period to win it. We have no superstars on this team. It seems like a different player makes a big play each night."

When you're in the kind of zone the Whalers are in now, your confidence never wanes — especially late in tight games, according to DeBoer.

"The way we've been playing, even when it's 1-1 late in the game, or even if we're down one goal, there's the feeling that somebody's going to make a play to get us the win," DeBoer said. "It's been a very satisfying season because nobody expected us to be where we're at right now."

Considering the credentials both goalies brought into the game, it figured to be a low-scoring, defense-dominated contest. Zepp was the owner of a 2.47 goals-against average (second-best in the OHL) while Sarnia netminder Greg Hewitt boasted a 2.64 GAA (third-best in the league).

Thanks to Hewitt's solid play, Butturli's ice-breaking goal stood up until the 16:41 mark of the first period when Plymouth center Stephen Weiss stuffed in a rebound shot to knot the game at 1-1. Damian Surma and Tomas Kurka were credited with assists on the goal.

Zepp was spectacular when he had to be in the second period, stoning break-away opportunities from Jeff Heerema and Dusty Jamieson.

With both teams' defenses rising to the occasion, the game looked destined for overtime. However, with just over nine minutes to go in the third period, McBride stole the puck from a Sting defenseman in front of the net and knocked it in before Hewitt could react.

Plymouth peppered 24 shots at Hewitt.

The lone dark spot for the Whalers was their performance on the power play.

"It was atrocious," DeBoer said, referring to his team's 0-for-6 effort with a man advantage. "Because we don't have the most talented team in the world, we struggle on the power play. In fact, we're near the bottom of the league in that category."

"However, our penalty killing was outstanding tonight, like it has been all season. And that is the sign of a team that plays with a lot of effort."

PLYMOUTH 7, GUELPH 5: No doubt the Guelph Storm fans were loving this. The hottest team in the OHL pays a visit, and the Storm knock 'em around big-time, putting four goals into their net in the first period and making it 5-0 1:40 into the second.

Eric Beaudoin had scored two goals and assisted on another in the Storm's early rise. Then came the fall. The Whalers put four goals into Guelph's net before the second period was over, among them a short-handed goal from Kris Vernarsky and a power-play goal from Justin Williams.

Stephen Weiss knotted it at 5-1 with a power-play goal 2:41 into the third period. Damian Surma netted what proved to be the game-winner 6:32 into the period; Tomas Kurka's second

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