

NIAGARA COMMUNITY NEWS

Want outlet? Alum hockey's the name of the game

Bishop Duffy, Niagara Catholic in blast from past

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LEWISTON — So, what exactly is the purpose of the Dick Nolan Classic — the Bishop Duffy/Niagara Catholic Alumni Hockey game?

Is it a chance for grown men to relive the glory days?

Is it a chance to get in a grueling skate to work off some of the holiday cheer and goodies that are a staple of Christmas and New Year's?

Is it a chance to get in some exercise before eating some of the holiday goodies and cheer that are a staple of this catered event?

Is it a chance to work over someone with a stick, just because hockey tends to be an aggressive, emotional game, in which old and/or new scores sometimes need to be settled, regardless of the circumstances?

Is it a chance just to experience that winning feeling?

The correct answer is all of the above.

Thirty Duffy/Catholic graduates representing four decades of school alums, attended the sixth Dick Nolan Classic on New Year's Eve at Niagara University's Dwyer Arena.



Photos by Charles Lewis/Buffalo News
White team goalie Russell DeFranco, left, tries to stop a shot during the Alumni Hockey game Dec. 31. White team player John Edwards, above right, fights with the red team's Vinny Jowdy for the puck.

The annual game, the brainchild of Niagara Catholic graduates Vincent McConeghy (1982) and Dave San Lorenzo (1981), provides old teammates and friends with the opportunity to catch up with each other. It also gives them a chance, provided they're on the right team, to experience victory — something many of the alums didn't experience too often during their scholastic careers.

"This is like the highlight of the year [for me]," said Doug Jowdy, a 1981 graduate who is a sports psychologist in Colorado. "It's just such a special event. It's just like having a high school reunion. I feel like I've seen these guys yesterday."

And Jowdy hasn't played in this game the last five years due

to a back injury. He hopes to be healthy enough to play in the 2008 event but will be at the game regardless of his physical health.

Guido Virtuoso, a 1976 graduate who plays in two Niagara Falls men's hockey leagues during the winter, said his participation in the game is more about seeing the guys once a year and keeping longtime friendships alive than trying to win the game. Still, he scored three goals and earned game MVP honors while helping the Red Team beat the White Team, 7-3.

The squads are determined by McConeghy and San Lorenzo, who make sure the teams have equal talent so that games are competitive. Last year, the

two teams played to a tie. Last Monday's winter classic was tied 3-3 late in the second period before the Big Red pulled away.

Both teams wore Detroit Red Wings-style jerseys that had the words Duffy written on the front instead of the Red Wings' logo.

"It's nice to see the guys once a year. It's a pleasure and an honor," Virtuoso said. "The score doesn't matter. The camaraderie matters and the joking around."

And there was plenty of joking around, with the zingers flowing out of the mouth of 1978 graduate Dino Gambino as smoothly as a Bobby Orr-led breakout.

The good ones escaped his

lips once the Red Team had the game in control.

The White Team had the game's only power play after San Lorenzo, the event's all-time penalty-minutes leader, took his annual seat in the penalty box. The White Team barely touched the puck during the two-minute power play, prompting Gambino to say, "Don't you want it? There are five of you out there."

Even the White Team got a chuckle from that.

And it was that type of bond Nolan promoted during his coaching time at Duffy/Catholic from 1977 to 1985, according to McConeghy.

The Duffy/Catholic players have been pretty tight because of the one-for-all and all-for-one

attitude that Nolan, a 1974 graduate, promoted during his time behind the bench.

"We basically wanted to do something," said McConeghy, a 1982 graduate. "A lot of the guys still play in adult leagues, and it's a good way to come together once a year and pay tribute to Dick Nolan, who was a good coach and is a good guy."

"Everyone that made the team played regardless of their talent level. He [Nolan] never shortened his bench, but he never had a lot of talent to work with to begin with."

Nolan, who usually participates in the game, missed this year's event because, of all things, he had to work.

Still, his son Richie played in the game.

The event culminated in traditional fashion, with the families of all the participants gathering for a skate together after the game — creating memories of their own while listening, and watching, the alums recall the good old days.

"I think it could be a good trend for other high schools to do similar things and excite the youth and give them inspiration to play ... when they see their parents still playing and having these relationships that last forever," Jowdy said.

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