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Panthers teams a blade brigade in the Big Apple

By Maureen Boyce | SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

February 22, 2009

Two teams from northwest Broward found success in New York recently as each skated off with titles in their respective tournaments.

The Florida JR. Panthers Squirt Minor '99 squad went 2-1-1 to prevail at the Amherst Knights' Top Gun Invitational AAA tournament, while the JR. Panthers Bantam Major '94 claimed the Bantam AA title at the Empire State Cup.

The win was a coup for the JR. Panthers AAAs based at Incredible ICE in Coral Springs. The annual event in Amherst traditionally features some of North America's elite youth travel programs.

The JR. Panthers opened the event against the defending champion Knights. The Florida skaters were impressive from the outset, battling the Knights to a 2-2 tie.

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The 'Cats went on to defeat Team Comcast from New Jersey, 4-1, and the Rochester (N.Y.) Americans, 4-2. [The Panthers](#) were derailed in their last game of the preliminary round, falling 6-3 to the undefeated Detroit Honey Baked.

In the semifinals, the JR. Panthers eliminated the Syracuse Stars, 3-1, to advance to the title game against the imposing Tonawanda (N.Y.) Lightning. The Lightning earned its bid to the final by defeating Detroit Honey Baked 5-1.

The Panthers grounded the Lightning 5-1 to seal the Squirt Minor AAA title.

Meanwhile, the Coral Springs-based '94s went undefeated to win the Bantam AA title at the Empire State Cup in Rochester. The Panthers sealed the title by defeating the

Bethlehem (Pa.) Blast 2-1.

Middle schoolers embark on roller hockey season

The South Florida Inline Hockey League made its debut earlier this month with a full slate of games at Weston Regional Park.

"The kids were excited six months before we even started," said league commissioner and founder David Bernstein. "And we're just at the tip of the iceberg — there are a lot of exciting things coming soon."

The league, offering structured competition for middle school teams, opened its inaugural season with 12 entrants. Most middle school teams are not sanctioned as school activities, and some do not even use their school's name.

That has not dampened the spirits of students, who are eager to play for their respective schools if only in an informal manner. The response among students at two area middle schools was so enthusiastic that each school is represented by three teams

Indian Ridge is represented by the [Jaguars](#), the Indian Jaguars and the Ridge Jaguars. Falcon Cove students, meanwhile, make up the Falcon Cove Gold, Falcon Cove Blue and Falcon Cove Black.

The current membership also includes the Belen Prep School Wolverines (Miami), Sagemont Lions, Silver Trail Mustangs, Tequesta Trace Hockey, Pioneer [Eagles](#) and Seminole Panthers.

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Belen Prep's Michael Aguad was the leading scorer on opening night, recording six goals and three assists in the Wolverines' 11-8 win over the Sagemont Lions.

Games are every Wednesday night on three different rinks.

The league's Web site, www.sfihl.org, provides updated information, including schedules, results, statistics and individual team pages.

Sharp Shooters take out opponents in Orlando tournament

The Glacier Sharp Shooters Pee-wee A team hit the bulls-eye with a championship performance at the recent Orlando Youth Hockey Association MLK Tournament.

The Pompano Beach-based squad won all five games en route to winning the Pee-wee A title, becoming the lone entry from Broward or Palm Beach counties to take a top spot at the fifth annual youth ice hockey extravaganza.

A sterling performance by forward Zach Gilbert of Coral Spring helped the Sharp Shooters edge the host Orlando Stars 3-2, in the opening game. The score was tied 2-2 with 5:53 left in regulation when Gilbert came through with the go-ahead goal. Gilbert's tally not only provided the winning margin but also secured for Gilbert a hat trick (three goals).

The Sharp Shooters went on to power past the Junior Everblades (Esterro), 6-1, the Clarkstown (N.Y.) Capitals, 7-1, and the Tampa-based Junior Bulls, 6-3. Goalies Danny Lassman of Parkland and Joey Martellaro of Sunrise split duty throughout the tournament.

The Sharp Shooters' 4-0 record to that point earned them a berth in the final, featuring a rematch with the Orlando Stars.

Gilbert continued his red-hot ways in the decisive showdown, notching his second hat trick of the tournament in the Sharp Shooters' 7-3 victory. The scoring was rounded out by goals from Tyler Workman of Boca Raton (two), Ben Ribotsky of Parkland and Mark Midkiff of Coconut Creek. Lassman played strong in net, making 14 saves to earn the win.

In the championship game, Gilbert, along with linemates Charles Bonani (Boca Raton) and Midkiff, combined for eight points. Overall, the trio boasted a tournament-high 32 points.

Normally an offensive-minded forward, Parkland's Alex Newhouse played defense in the tournament and, paired with Cody Shamon of Fort Lauderdale, created numerous scoring chances by jumping into the play.

Girls Night Out

The Girls' Night Out hockey program has resumed at Glacier Ice and Snow Arena in Pompano Beach. The league welcomes female players of all ability levels. The league is in action Monday nights.

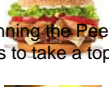
Girls' Night Out is a year-round program, with each session lasting 10 weeks. For more information, e-mail Karen Ota at tko4488@aol.com, or call 954-258-9334.

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