

Rainiers Cap History Making Season with Run to USA Hockey Tier-I Quarterfinals

Kent Valley Ice Centre, Kent, WA 19 April, 2010

The Kent Valley Rainiers ended the 2009-10 season with a berth in the USA Hockey Tier-I 12U National Championship Quarterfinals. The four teams finishing ahead of the Rainiers in the National Championship standings were from Detroit, Chicago, New York and Boston, home to the four US original six NHL franchises with hockey roots dating back to the mid 1920's. This season the Rainiers established the credibility of Pacific Northwest hockey throughout North America and set a standard of excellence for future area Tier-I teams to uphold. The quarterfinal berth capped a remarkable season of momentous accomplishments for the Rainiers.

The season began in August with training camp at Eastern Washington University. Players got to experience life on a college campus as they stayed in the dormitories and ate in the dining hall. Training camp provided the players and coaches an opportunity to build the bonds and establish the goals that would prove so important over the lengthy season.

The Rainiers began their exhibition season in September against two of the teams that have been integral to the program's development. First up was Semiahmoo for a pair of contests sandwiched around a Mariners vs. Yankees game that saw more than 100 players, parents and family members attend. Semiahmoo provided a great early test of what the season had in store as they had their own remarkable run to the BC Provincial Championship game. The team headed north later in the month to challenge Burnaby Winter Club, perennially the top program in BC. This year's BWC squad was truly a special collection of talent as they traveled throughout North America piling up impressive results including a berth in the finals of the Quebec International Pee Wee Tournament and winning the BC Provincial Championship. The Rainiers have been very fortunate to have strong relationships with the top BC programs providing a local benchmark for development and competitiveness.

During October the Rainiers participated in the Abbotsford Icebreaker and Kamloops Invitational tournaments. The team was up to the challenge as they made impressive runs to the semi-finals of both tournaments. BWC knocked off the Rainiers at Abbotsford on their way to the championship. The Rainiers lost a heartbreaking sudden death shootout to North Shore Winter Club (NSWC) in Kamloops.

The team packed their bags and headed on their first airplane trip of the season when they participated in the St. Louis Jr. Blues Thanksgiving tournament. The team had the opportunity to challenge top 10 USA Hockey teams from Boston and St. Louis. The Rainiers finished with a 2-2-2 record including a back and forth battle with the #7 ranked Minuteman Flames, Marlborough, Massachusetts, ending in a 4-4 tie.

December was truly a special month for the Rainiers program as Kent Valley hosted the first annual CAN/AM Challenge. Semiahmoo and Cloverdale represented Canada, while the LA Selects joined the Rainiers representing the USA. This marked the second consecutive season that a Tier-I team from Los Angeles traveled to the Pacific Northwest for exhibition games affirming the reputation the Rainiers program has achieved in the Pacific District. Players and family members from all four teams were treated to dinner at Kent Valley Ice Centre along with fun activities for the players. Parents and coaches from Los Angeles commented on the camaraderie amongst all the teams at the event which they had not experienced at other Tier-I tournaments and exhibitions. The Rainiers capped December with an impressive run to the finals of the NSWC Holiday tournament. Along the way the Rainiers avenged an earlier defeat to the host NSWC squad with their most complete game of the season winning the semi-final matchup 3-1.

January allowed the Rainiers to catch their breath and regroup for the 2nd half of the season. Early in the month they traveled to Semiahmoo for a pair of exhibition games along with a night of curling for players and parents. A mid-season training camp was conducted in Wenatchee to refocus the team on the challenges that lie ahead. At the end of January the Rainiers traveled south to Los Angeles for exhibition games against the teams that would be challenging for the Tier-I Pacific District title. The Rainiers split pairs of games against the LA Jr. Kings and LA Selects and developed confidence in their ability to compete against the programs that have dominated the Pacific District for more than a decade.

The Rainiers traveled to Vernon, BC for the 39th Annual Coca Cola Classic in February. History was not on the Rainiers side as no US team had ever won the event. The Rainiers got off to a strong start and breezed through the round-robin and semi-finals. The championship game would be a different story as the Rainiers were matched up against a top team from Edmonton. The teams battled through regulation, wound up tied and headed to overtime. The Rainiers scored the overtime winner and became the first US champion of this prestigious event.

The season was winding down and March brought the Rainiers to San Jose, CA for the Pacific District Tier-I Championships. Heading into the tournament, the Rainiers had earned hard fought victories against all of the competitors during the season, but knew that it would take a tremendous effort to overcome the talented LA-area teams. The Rainiers finished the round-robin undefeated and faced a rematch against the LA Selects for the Pacific District Tier-I 12U championship and a berth in the USA Hockey National Championships. The teams waged an epic battle that went to double overtime before the Rainiers knocked in the winning goal that began the celebration. Head Coach Adam Kurtenbach commented after the game:

"Our program is based on setting goals and putting plans in place to achieve them. Three years ago we set a goal to reach the USA Hockey Tier-I National Championships, something that hadn't been accomplished by a Pacific Northwest team in decades. Through hard work and perseverance, we overcame opposition and obstacles to achieve our goal. Long after the skates and sticks are packed away, the players will always have the life lessons that through hard work and dedication anything is possible."

The Rainiers finished the season with an 8-3 record against US Pacific District Tier-I teams.

The victory in San Jose started a whirlwind of activity preparing for the USA Hockey Tier-I National Championships in Buffalo, NY. The team was outfitted with new jerseys and a pre-game wardrobe that included shirt and ties adorned with the Kent Valley logo. Upon arriving in Buffalo, the team had their picture taken with the Stanley Cup and visited nearby Niagara Falls. On the ice the team posted impressive victories over New Jersey and the host team before falling to the Valley Jr. Warriors from Massachusetts in the closest of all the quarterfinal games. The team thoroughly enjoyed their Tier-I Nationals experience and are looking forward to building upon the Rainiers tradition next season. The Rainiers are continuing to place many of their players with elite Spring teams including the Vancouver Vipers, Vancouver Selects and Pacific Selects.

The success enjoyed by the Rainiers this season is the culmination of a three year program that started with a simple philosophy – Players First. All Rainiers activities are directed at player development and enjoyment. An important byproduct of Players First is extremely high parent satisfaction. Program priorities of Family, School and Hockey are reinforced throughout the season with special recognition for honor roll achievement. This past season saw nearly 70% of Rainiers players make their school's honor roll.

"My son's hockey skills have developed tremendously along with his self-confidence. He's an honor roll student and the President of his class at school. The Rainiers program has been principally responsible for his development on and off the ice."

Rainiers Parent

Much of the Rainiers on-ice success can be attributed to early adoption of the principles outlined by USA Hockey in their American Development Model (ADM). The Rainiers are adopting the ADM accelerated track as they enter the Bantam division for the 2010-11 season. Players will experience team and skill development practices with 4-5 ice sessions per week and a 40-50 game schedule. Appropriate off-ice training will continue to be provided by a professional strength and conditioning coach instructing long term athlete development (LTAD) principles.

Additional information regarding the Rainiers program can be obtained from Danny Lorenz, Kent Valley Hockey Director. Please contact Danny directly if you would like to learn more about upcoming Kent Valley Rainiers 2010-11 tryouts and pre-season camps (1996, 1997 and 1998 birth year players). Danny can be reached at 253-850-2400 x14 or danny@kentvalleyicecentre.com.

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