

## Using girls hockey to change Kearney

### Kearney

#### Program that draws athletes from 11 states and Canada enhances school's community, finances

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At first glance, the new Selects Academy girls hockey team at Bishop Kearney High School is just one of the many youth programs that call the ice rinks of Rochester home.

There are 19 players on the roster and the school buys ice time at Bill Gray's Regional Iceplex for a schedule of practices and games that runs right into March.

This is hardly your typical USA Hockey- sanctioned program, however. And it's far different than any other sports team from a Section V high school.

Kearney has entered the boarding school business, and in christening the girls hockey program, school officials believe they have accomplished three objectives.

» By enrolling students from across the country and Canada, they have enhanced the high school experience — educationally and culturally — for everyone in the classroom; » The long-dormant, dust-collecting third floor of the school again has a purpose. Once the living quarters for teachers but virtually unused the past 15 years except by spiders, the renovated north end is the hockey dorm;

» A boarding school for hockey players was a venture that went far beyond

See **KEARNEY, Page 7A** first year of having an elite girls hockey program.



**Holding onto a pillow, Talli Warren chats with Bishop Kearney High School girls hockey teammates as they hang out after dinner.**

CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



**Bishop Kearney's Sydney Bard during an early-season hockey practice. Kearney is in its**

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typical planning and geographical restraints, and quite possibly may help provide future financial stability at the Roman Catholic institution in Irondequoit.

That's quite the hat trick.

"It's a new idea, it's innovative," Steve Salluzzo, Bishop Kearney president, said. "Girls are coming from all over the country. If you grew up in Monroe County and western New York, your perspective is based on that. But as you add states and countries to the mix, your perspectives change and your critical thinking changes."

Which is what educators want of students. And while the hockey players — representing 11 states and the Canadian province of New Brunswick — weren't coming to Kearney from California and Idaho and Florida and Wisconsin without their skates, classroom excellence is mandatory.

"If they're just hockeydriven, they can stay where they are," Chris Baudo, the head coach, said. "We're committed to preparing these young women for college. We want to help them develop character, integrity, the intangibles; the non-cognitive stuff that will help them be successful in life."

Because this is a boarding school program and not a team participating under the umbrella of Section V and the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, the Selects Academy team isn't playing a late-November to late-February schedule. It's already up and running, playing other prep schools and youth U-16 teams from the Northeast and beyond. It will play a pair of home games against a team from Boston at

10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Saturday at Bill Gray's in Henrietta.

Games began on the second weekend in September with a tournament in suburban Toronto. Through 13 games, the team has 10 wins, 1 loss and 2 ties. In five games at a tournament in Exeter, New Hampshire, to start the month, the Selects Academy team went 3-0-2 and didn't allow a goal.

An impressive beginning, to be sure. Who knew the administration at Kearney was so astute at judging hockey talent?

Actually, the school officials aren't. Their partner in this venture, Legacy Global Sports, assembled the roster. Legacy Global Sports is a New Hampshire-based company specializing in event and athlete management. It's a 50/50 collaboration.

"They're not experts at hockey and we're not experts at education," said Kathy Pippy, director of girls hockey for Legacy's Selects Academy. Introduced to one another about two years ago by the Monroe County Sports Commission, Kearney and Legacy Global Sports announced formation of the program in November 2014, the school hired the coaches a year later, and the puck dropped on the inaugural season in September.

"This is our new flagship program," said Travis Howe, director of global hockey for the company. He's the grandson of hockey icon Gordie Howe.

There are three juniors, eight sophomores, six freshmen and two eighth-graders on the team. Just one player is from the Rochester area: Kiara Zanon of Fairport is a freshman forward. Six others are from New York. Players were recruited through Legacy's Selects Academy, and by Baudo and assistant coach Julie Knerr.

The players all live in the school dorm, as does Knerr. She's one of the "dorm mothers," along with a teacher at Kearney. There's a cafeteria (Keenan's Restaurant prepares the meals), a team meeting room and a lounge, and every fixture — from desks to carpet to light switches to room airconditioning units — is new.

"They're so nice," Syd Bard, a sophomore forward from New Hartford, near Utica, said of the dorm rooms. "We're spoiled."

Kearney's boys' hockey program, a cooperative team in Section V that included students from Eastridge and Wayne Central high schools, folded following the 2012-13 season because there weren't enough players.

Now the school is selling girls elite hockey and top-notch education in a high school environment, with a collegiate hockey scholarship the goal for most, if not all, players. Two players, Bard and defenseman Talli Warren from Mundleville, New Brunswick, have already made verbal commitments for college — Bard to Colgate and Warren to New Hampshire.

"It's nice being at a school where everyone is going for the same thing," Ellie Zweber, a forward from Santa Barbara, California, said. "You become a family. You can be comfortable when you're so far from home."

Many of the girls could have played high-end U-16 hockey at home, but that usually would have meant long commutes to and from the rink, and a commitment to a hockey life.

"These girls are always practicing at night (while growing up); they're doing homework in the car," Baudo said. "They miss prom, the homecoming."

Enjoying everything that high school has to offer is a big part of what Kearney's Selects Academy offers,

Baudo said.

“I firmly believe in the power of a boarding school experience; ‘Come to Bishop Kearney High School and capture your high school life back,’ ” said Baudo, who grew up in the Buffalo suburb of Tonawanda and spent 12 seasons coaching boys’ prep-school hockey at The Gunnery in Washington, Connecticut.

“The residential opportunity for these girls is unique. Nothing mirrors it to prepare kids for the college experience. You learn time management, you learn the discipline it takes to have success. You learn about yourself. It’s a very holistic experience.”

A typical day begins with a 7 or 7:30 a.m. wakeup call, classes from 8 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., a van ride to the rink for a 75- to 90-minute practice, followed by a workout, and then the van ride back to school for dinner, study hall and cleaning/laundry chores. The usual free time is from after dinner, around 6:45 p.m., until study hall begins at 8.

“They’re getting the typical high school experience in an atypical setting,” Salluzzo said.

Kearney’s girls program is the only one of its kind in the region. The others in New York are Northwoods School in Lake Placid; Hoosac School in Hoosick, Rensselaer County, near the Vermont border; and Millbrook School in Millbrook, Dutchess County.

It’s expensive — well over \$40,000 before financial assistance. Salluzzo would not disclose the precise cost, saying only that it’s “consistent with other programs.” The school had no difficulty filling the roster.

This year’s U-16 team was merely the beginning. Next season, Kearney also will have a U-19 team, ensuring players on this team can continue to play hockey while they earn their high school diplomas.

Renovation of the third-floor dormitory was completed in August. There are 21 student rooms with 42 beds, enough for two teams. The south end eventually will be renovated and will have equal space, though it may not be for hockey. The grand plan calls for another boarding-school sport, though nothing has been finalized, Salluzzo said.

For now, Kearney and Legacy Global Sports have gone all in on hockey. Pippy’s vision: “When you think Rochester, you think girls hockey.”

Kearney, with just over 300 students, is thinking about the future as well. Those who run the school know the impact hockey can make at a private institution. The sport essentially saved a boarding school in southern Minnesota.

“That’s a fair assessment,” said Gordie Stafford, director of hockey at Shattuck-St. Mary’s in Faribault, Minnesota. He’s also the girls prep hockey coach at the school. Shattuck-St. Mary’s is an Episcopal-affiliated prep school. In the early 1990s, the school was in dire straits due to declining enrollment.

Administrators decided to create an elite boys’ hockey program. They struck gold. The school was resuscitated and now owns perhaps the most famous youth hockey program in the country. A girls program, as well as an elite soccer program, provide enrollment stability.

“The business of private schools is very competitive and you have to find ways to find customers,” Stafford said. “Hockey established a name for the school outside of Minnesota.”

That, in turn, drew students, and not just for hockey, but for what Shattuck calls its “Centers of Excellence” in fields such as biosciences, engineering and vocal performance.

“And that obviously helped sustain the institution,” Stafford said. “We attract students who are passionate about their particular field of interest.”

A lot of them play hockey. The alumni list reads like a Who’s Who of the National Hockey League: Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby, Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews, Minnesota Wild standout Zach Parise, Buffalo Sabres newcomer Kyle Okposo and Stafford’s son Drew, the former Rochester Americans and Sabres right winger. Kearney studied the Shattuck model. The new program fills a need for girls across New York, and the country. “You get to the 16-U level and there’s no opportunity for high school hockey,” said John Gerardi of Yonkers, whose daughter, Frannie, is a goalie on the Kearney team. “The reality is, with girls hockey at the highest level, it’s hard. We thought Selects Academy offered more as a hockey program. Her goal is to play college hockey. As a parent, you don’t want to get in the way, so we’re trying to support her in any way we can.” Kearney administrators believe there are many families that will feel the same way for years to come.

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