

Heart and soul of hockey

The Great Blizz special hockey program's second season begins on Sept. 19

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KINGSTON – From a dream, to a reality, to a nightmare and then back to a dream. That's the first year in a nutshell for The Great Blizz special hockey program. After a small break between sessions the group will be back on the ice at The Bog in Kingston for their second season starting on Saturday, Sept. 19.

"It was a wild ride, I'll tell you that," Steve Nearman, president and executive director of The Great Blizz, said about the first

year of the program. "With a program like this you start with two or three players and then you build from there. We were very lucky and had a great response to the program and I expect that we'll have at least 15 players to go along with our awesome mentors and coaches when we get together on the 19th.

"That's an awesome number and I expect that it will continue to grow," he added. "That means we are reaching people because they are coming to us to join in the fun. I'd love to touch as many people as I can with this program. We're building this one player at a time."

See HOCKEY, B3



Declan Bohan keeps his eye on the ball as he learns to perfect his ice hockey skills. [COURTESY PHOTO/ BILL WEDGE]

The Great Blizz special hockey program is open to skaters of all ages, helping people with intellectual and/or development disabilities learn and grow their ice hockey skills. Nearman's son, Jonathan, was part of a special hockey program when they lived in the Virginia area and he brought the concept with them when the family moved to Plymouth a few years back.

You try to account for everything when you are putting together a new business project. But a world-wide pandemic can't really be built into and sort of a business timeline.

"On March 7 we had a special guest with us, 1980 U.S. Olympian Dave Silk, who was a member of the Miracle on Ice team. I was an awesome day and he even brought his gold medal for everyone to try on," Nearman said. "But that was the last training session we had for months because that's when the COVID-19 restrictions went into place.

"We finally got back on the ice together on July 11 to finish out the season."

Nearman said one of the best things from the entire first year was when The Great Blizz select team took the ice against the Boston Bruins alumni squad for a charity event.

"Absolutely incredible people,"



Declan Bohan and mentor Ava Dant take a break from the action. [COURTESY PHOTOS/ BILL WEDGE]

Nearman said about the event, which will happen again on Feb. 27, 2021, but this time at The Bog. "It was mind-blowing for me to meet some of those players and how great they were to everyone. It was one of those days where everything went right and the Bruins alumni had such a great time hanging out with our players."

Nearman said extreme COVID-19 precautions will remain in place for the new season, which will include 34 Saturday sessions

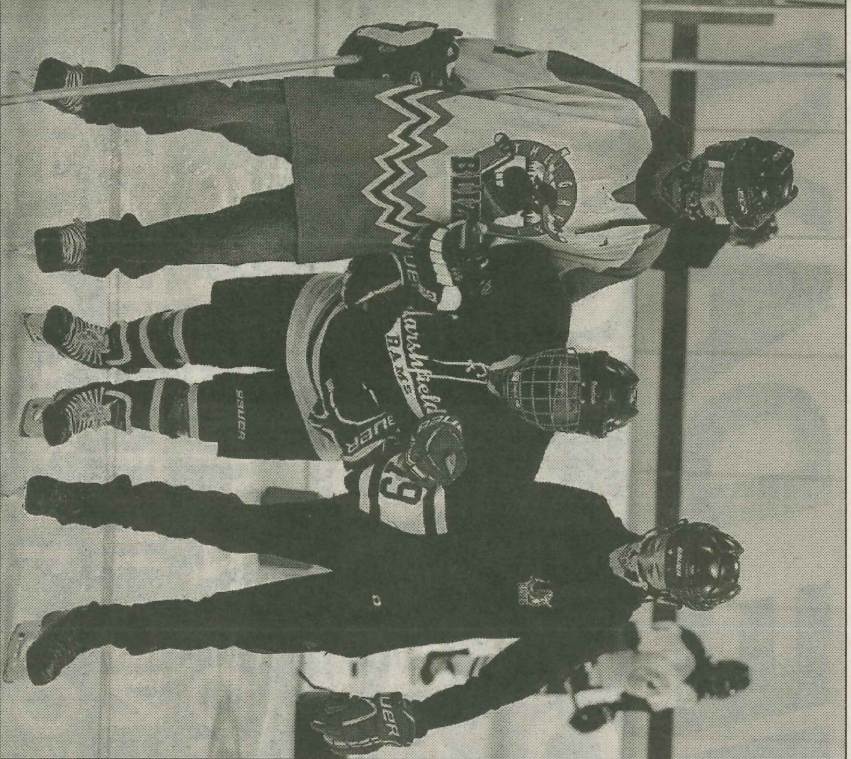
and run until Memorial Day of 2021. Each hour-long session begins at 7 a.m. and also includes a large number of mentors and coaches to help out each week.

"We ask that everyone - players, coaches and mentors included - wear a facemask from when they leave their car until when they get back to their car," Nearman said. "When they walk into the building we'll have a table set up where everyone will get their temp taken and fill out a short Coronavirus questionnaire."

We're just trying to take every precaution possible right now for everyone's safety."

Nearman said there are hopes of taking the team to a national tournament in the Washington, D.C. area sometime in 2021. For more information on The Great Blizz go to <https://thegreatblizz.sportingin.com/>

Email the reporter at dwoicott@wickedlocal.com and you can follow him on Twitter, @DavidWolcott.



ABOVE: Hunter Kenn makes his way across the ice with a couple of his friends.

LEFT: Matt Fraser takes a spin around the ice with coaches Tomm Turner and Hilary Jorgensen.