

Greenwich's Atkinson hosts week-long camp at Stamford Twin Rinks

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STAMFORD -- Hosting his second youth camp in as many weeks at the Stamford Twin Rinks Columbus Blue Jackets right winger and Greenwich native Cam Atkinson couldn't help but reflect on similar camps that he participated in as a kid.

The camps, he said, were instrumental in helping him fine-tune his play, and he hopes this year's campers are benefitting the same way he once did.

"We've been trying to do this for a long time," Atkinson said. "I made it to the NHL, and it became a lot of easier for kids who knew who I am -- they wanted to come. These kids are having a blast. It's fun."

The camp is made up of youngsters from several towns, many coming from Darien, New Canaan and Greenwich.

"Obviously, I don't go 100 percent, but I try to show them that it takes hard work, and with time and dedication you can fulfill your dreams," Atkinson said. "They see a smaller-type guy out there; half of them are almost my size as it is. Anything can be achieved if you put your mind to it."

Atkinson isn't alone in his belief that these types of camps help youth players hone their skills; the campers themselves indicated that they can feel themselves improving.

"Shooting and skating has been the best part and I've gotten better at battling for the puck," said New Canaan's Joey Mallozzi, an 8-year-old center. "I've had so much fun. It's a camp and not a clinic and camps are supposed to be fun."

"It was fun. I got taught a lot of things. I've learned to get better at a lot more things," said Stamford's Ari Silverstein, a 9-year-old defenseman/winger. "My offense and some defense (has improved the most). I get taught a lot."

Atkinson and his Blue Jackets narrowly missed out on the playoffs last season, losing a tie-breaker to the Minnesota Wild for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Western conference.

Now in the Eastern Conference, Atkinson is hopeful that last year's strong finish will carry over into the 2013-14 campaign, also noting that most of the team's core players return.

"(Missing on the tiebreaker) was tough. The second half run we had was pretty strong; I think we were the hottest team in the NHL at the time. It goes to show that we can play with any team on any night and we're bringing back pretty much the core group of guys we had last year. We're going to have a great squad next year, and it's going to be fun and exciting."

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Cam Atkinson Benefit Festival set for Friday

The 2nd Annual Cam Atkinson Keep Hope Alive Festival will be held on Friday from 7-10 p.m., in Stamford. The star-studded evening will benefit the Marty Lyons Foundation. The Marty Lyons Foundation's mission is granting wishes to children with terminally ill and life threatening illnesses. The impressive lineup of sports figures who are teaming up with Greenwich native Cam Atkinson of the Columbus Blue Jackets includes: Chris Kreider, Derick Brassard and Dave Maloney, New York Rangers; Matt Moulson, New York Islanders; Martin St. Louis, Tampa Bay Lightning; Kevin Shattenkirk, St. Louis Blues; Nick Bonino, Anaheim Ducks; Marc Arcobello, Edmonton Oilers; Nathan Gerbe, Buffalo Sabres; Jimmy Hayes and Ben Smith, Chicago Black Hawks; James Van Riemsdyk, Toronto Maple Leafs, and others. This energizing, fundraising evening for adults and kids with Dave Maloney as MC, sports celebrities and arcade, interactive games, entertainment and food will be celebrated at the Old Town Hall, 175 Atlantic St. in Stamford. For information, tickets or to make a donation click: www.firstgiving.com/fundraiser/camatkinsonkeephopealive

