

New Canaan's Pacioretty conducts week-long youth hockey camp in Stamford

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STAMFORD -- Fresh off of his breakout 2011-12 NHL campaign in which he tallied 65 points (33 goals, 32 assists) for the Montreal Canadiens, New Canaan native Max Pacioretty returned to his roots to host a peewee hockey camp at the Stamford Twin Rinks.

On Tuesday, the second day of the five-day camp, peewee players from New Canaan and Darien got an opportunity to participate in a variety of drills and scrimmage one another. According to Pacioretty, youth hockey camps can go a long way in a player's development.

"There's a good mix of age and skill level and it's good to see everyone come out," Pacioretty said. "They work pretty hard during the first session and then it's more fun and games after; they know that if they get the hard work out of the way that they can have some fun."

And, of course, learning from an NHL player and hometown hero isn't a bad perk for the campers.

"We skate a little at the beginning and then get into some games," said Liam Griffiths, an 11-year-old left winger from New Canaan. "The best part is probably playing with Max Pacioretty because he's an amazing player. I'd totally do a camp like this again."

"I like it because of the drills," said Andrew Smith, a 9-year-old right winger from Darien. "Doing the drills and having fun is helping me get better."

Several of the campers seem to be using the opportunity to hone their skills, specifically skating.

"I really like how we do drills at the beginning and then we do some 3-on-3 and 4-on-4," said Patrick Mauboussi, a 10-year-old left winger from Darien. "My skating has gotten better."

"My skating, probably (has improved the most)," said Gavin Foster, a 9-year-old left winger from Darien.

Pacioretty also recognized how special it can be for any youth hockey player to be taught by someone who's made it to the NHL.

"When I was young, anytime there was an older player from the area who I looked up to, I always got excited," Pacioretty said. "(The camp) is motivation to know that you can make it to the pro level from this area. There are a lot of good kids out there, and they all want to get better and they're all having fun."

During the 2010-11 season, Pacioretty suffered a fracture of the cervical vertebra and a severe concussion -- which was considered a career-threatening injury -- on a highly-questionable hit by Boston's Zdeno Chara. The 23-year-old left winger responded with the best season of his four-year NHL career in 2011-12, although his Canadiens fared far worse, concluding the regular season in last place in the Eastern Conference with a 31-35-16 mark.

In June, Pacioretty was presented with the Masterson Trophy, which is given to the player who "best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey." Pacioretty won the award over fellow nominees Daniel Alfredsson of the Ottawa Senators and Joffrey Lupul of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"We're not far. They went out and made some key additions that are going to help the team, and hopefully that'll help us out big time this year," Pacioretty said. " (The Masterson Trophy) is a huge honor, especially being part of an organization like Montreal where so many great players have won awards. It's a step in the right direction. I hope to have a long career, and hopefully this is a building block."

