

Diabetes camp keeps athletes in top shape

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An area summer camp is teaching young athletes how to manage their diabetes to stay on top of their game.

Dskate is a hockey day camp in Milton that brings 80 players with type-1 diabetes together from all over the world including Sweden, Alaska and Florida. The kids between the ages of eight and 16 learn directly from Olympic and professional athletes who haven't let the chronic disease prevent them from competing at an elite level.

"I didn't have anyone to help me ... so I suffered a lot," said Chris Jarvis, who was part of the 2004 Canadian Olympic Rowing Team. Born in Burlington and raised in Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Grimsby, Jarvis founded I Challenge Diabetes in 2007, which aims to help diabetics live life to the fullest.

"I learned a lot of coping mechanisms," he said. "But it took 12 to 15 years to learn, even though I was competing at an Olympic level."

Jarvis doesn't want to see other young athletes struggle so he does off-ice training to teach them tricks to manage diabetes while playing.

Doctors with diabetes who helped him develop these skills are also at the camp.

"It's a team opportunity for a whole bunch of people with a challenge to learn how to overcome it," he said. "It's what camp is all about. I love to be involved with these athletes."

At the same time the players are learning how to manage their disease, they're taught hockey skills so they get better at the game overall.

Among the mentors at camp was retired NHL All Star and Stanley Cup winning defenceman Nick Boynton, who was diagnosed with type-1 diabetes at 18.

Swiss National League player and diabetic Cory Conacher was also there.

He has played with a number of NHL teams including the New York Islanders and Ottawa Senators.

"All the kids who are there all have the same problem and they share their experiences," says Dawn Harris, whose 15-year-old son, Hunter, attended the camp in its third year from July 27 to July 31 at Milton Sports Centre.

The Grade 10 student at Sir Allan MacNab Secondary School is often misunderstood by his teammates when he plays hockey because he has to keep a close eye on his blood sugar and adjust accordingly to be at the top of his game.

"He knows he's not alone," said Harris about camp. "It's invaluable."

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Assistant coach Francis DeSrosier demonstrates a skating drill to the campers.

BLOOD SUGAR TESTING

At the annual DSkate camp, approximately 80 kids with Type 1 Diabetes are taking part, with some of the kids coming from as far away Sweden and Alaska. Rasmus Gustafsson, 14, from Sweden checks his blood sugar level.

CHRIS JARVIS

Rasmus Gustafsson, 14, of Sweden (left) takes part in a stretching drill, led by former Pan Am rower Chris Jarvis, right.

