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RIVALRY NIGHT



FATHERS AND SONS:

The story of the first Dads' Trip in AHL history

By: Jonathan Kliment

The American Hockey League is often referred to as a proving ground. This does not only apply to the players on the ice, but also the many variations of policy changes that occur in the NHL. The AHL implemented the shootout, three-on-three overtime, dark-colored jerseys at home, all of which debuted in cities like Springfield, Binghamton and Rockford seasons before the NHL introduced these concepts. However, last weekend an NHL team passed something down to its AHL organization. When the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins traveled to Belleville, Ontario and Laval, Québec, they took their fathers with them for the first ever Dads' Trip in AHL history.

The annual Dads' Trip has become a staple of the Pittsburgh Penguins history since Ray Shero introduced it in his first season as general manager back in 2006. Now it is a part of just about every NHL team's schedule. The AHL, on the other hand, had never seen such an event. Wilkes-Barre/Scranton's Dads' Trip was the brain child of Penguins forward Tom Sestito, and when he approached the team's GM Bill Guerin and CEO Jeff Barrett with the idea, they instantly became very excited at the opportunity to give back to the people who gave much of their time raising the players and exceptional men that take the ice with pride at Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza.

For the first time, the dads got the chance to travel on the bus with the Penguins and see what AHL life on the road is really like. It wasn't a bad weekend to go, either, as the Penguins paid their first visit to the two newest teams in the AHL, the Belleville Senators and Laval Rocket. To round out the docket, the Penguins and their fathers dined in downtown Montréal on the last day of the trip to celebrate the weekend.

The only drawback from the dads' perspective might have been the method of transportation.

"I remember my bus rides when I played pro baseball," said Ryan Haggerty's father, Roger. "That's probably the least part I'm looking forward to."

Jarred Tinordi's dad, long-time NHLer Mark, echoed Mr. Haggerty's reluctance to sit on a bus for that long, but at least considered himself used to it.

"I rode the buses in junior for five years, I coached my kids in Washington D.C. and most of our games were in New Jersey and Boston," Mark Tinordi said. "I've been on that bus lots... I am looking forward to going on the trip."

Though this experience is unique to the AHL and many of the Penguins, some members of the roster have seen this before.

"I missed the last one with the Canadiens, when [Jarred] was with Montréal," Mark Tinordi said.





Back Row: Sean McKelvey, Mike McKegg, Dean Smith, Jim Nikkel, Tom McGrath, Mark Tinordi, Martin Dea, Andy Wilson, Greg Trotman, Roger Haggerty

Front Row: Scott Taylor, Tim Burton, George Kostopoulos, Kevin Hart

His son also mentioned that dad's excursion the Canadiens took years ago and his disappointment that Mark couldn't be there with him.

"It was kind of a bummer when he missed that one before," Jarred Tinordi said.

"I am sure it was a little bit more comfortable of a trip back then not sitting on buses the whole time, but I think he's excited about it anyway."

Over the years, the Pittsburgh Penguins have fared well when they play in front of their dads, going 2-0-1-1 in the last two years. Bringing the dads along sure seems to bring a boost of energy, but it's not all fun and games, as Ryan Haggerty pointed out before the buses departed for Belleville.

"It's a business trip for us," Ryan Haggerty said. "We've got two wins to focus on."

This was a sentiment shared by several players when they described their excitement for their dads to be in attendance, but also wanting to walk away from the weekend with four points.

"I wouldn't call it pressure, necessarily," defenseman Zach Trotman said. "It's a little bit of an energy boost if anything. It's an excitement. Nobody wants to bring their dads on a Dads' Trip and lose. Boys will be playing a little extra hard this weekend, making sure we come away with two wins this weekend."

And that's exactly what they did. The Penguins won both of their contests, extending their winning streak to a season-best seven games and taking over first place in the Atlantic Division. Ryan Haggerty was all business, scoring his first career hat trick and racking up six points on the weekend all in front of his father. Andrey Pedan woke up on Monday morning as the reigning CCM/AHL Player of the Week after he scored his first career hat trick and added two assists and a plus-five rating in those games.

It's safe to say the first Dads' Trip in AHL history was a grand success (for the visiting team).