

CHARITY GAME SYMBOLIZES STRENGTH, UNITY WITHIN CLOSE-KNIT KINGS COMMUNITY

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 19, 2015



Players from both teams collectively celebrating following the Be the Match charity game; Toyota Sports Center, August 16, 2015 (Photo credit: David Sheehan/CaliShooterOne Photography)

The excitement was palpable, the buildup was promising and on Sunday, the event lived up to its billing as the Be the Match charity hockey game was a rousing success. The event, presented by Knights of the Forum, saw some Los Angeles Kings legends, diehard hockey fans and a sellout crowd all supporting a wonderful cause at El Segundo's Toyota Sports Center.

On the ice, it was the Forum Blue Knights squaring off against the Gold Knights with the Forum Blues coming away with a 6-5 win.

Overall, the collective enthusiasm was irrepressible with fans having a wonderful time cheering on friends, family and former Kings – such as Bernie Nicholls and even longtime Kings trainer Pete Demers – whom they rooted for years ago at the Forum. But while the game was the centric event fans came out to see, this day represented so much more.

What started as a thought from the mind of longtime Kings fan **Chris Brito** turned into a tremendous outpouring of supporters wanting to do their part in saving a life.

When one of the Los Angeles Kings' most devoted fans, **Tanner Raboin**, passed away in 2011, the community lost not only a friend but a son and a brother.

Diagnosed with Chronic Granulomatous Disease, Tanner and his family were in search of a bone marrow transplant when the 19-year-old passed away. However, the Raboins as well as Tanner's friends remained determined to find transplants for those who are going through what young Tanner did.

Prior to Tanner's passing, his parents, Steven and Diane partnered up with the Be the Match Foundation, an organization dedicated to finding bone marrow and cord blood transplants to save the lives of those diagnosed with a blood cancer or an immune system or genetic disease. Be the Match has become a household term within the Kings community since Tanner's passing but this past Sunday, it reached a new echelon.

Organizers for Sunday's charity game, which was sponsored by the 2,300-plus member Facebook group, **Knights of the Forum**, were reaching for a goal of \$10,000. However, when everything was tallied up

between ticket sales, hockey memorabilia auctioned off, donations and matching funds, they were expected to rake in more than \$15,000. Organizers, though, were not able to provide a final tally right away.

Still, Sunday's event was tremendous.

With Jim Fox as an honorary coach and Daryl Evans and **Bernie Nicholls** taking part as players, the game garnered its share of Kings alumni in addition to **Bailey**, the beloved team mascot, and members of the **Kings Ice Crew** in addition to a plethora of volunteers who helped make the event so memorable.

"I am beyond thankful for the sponsors for matching what they have as everybody gave their hearts out there on the ice," **Andros Gonzalez**, founder of Knights of the Forum as well as one of the main organizers of Sunday's event. "Our volunteers were amazing. Everybody involved did more work than they anticipated and they are all heroes for Be the Match as far as I'm concerned. We have garnered interest from the Kings and they will be in touch with us for future games such as this."

Gonzalez, who served as a coach for the charity game continued his praise for everyone involved:

"I could not be more proud of a group like this and I'm sure we will all remember this for the rest of our lives."

In addition to the aforementioned Bailey and members of the Kings Alumni, many of the players from Sunday are members of Knights of the Forum. Two of which were **Christina Murphy** and **Natalie Uyeno Firestone**.

Murphy, who suited up for Forum Blue Knights, shared her experience:

"It was an incredible experience!," Murphy, a Kings fan for 15 years, told me. "What a rush! I had so much fun playing, and my team won! My legs are jello right now. I skated my ass off," she continued.

"Very proud and honored to have been a part of this special event."

Firestone, a longtime Kings fan and resident of nearby Torrance, had only started playing hockey this year. That, however, did not stop her from playing in the charity game and it was an experience she was honoured to be a part of.

"It was awesome! I was nervous, but excited at the same time,"

Firestone said. "My teammates were all really supportive and

Christina Murphy (right) after the game with brother Kevin (middle) and his girlfriend, Simona. (Photo credit: Cathy Murphy)

encouraging, so it took a lot of the pressure off. I still can't believe that I was out there skating against Bernie Nicholls!"

Becky Carpenter, who not only took part in Sunday's game but was integral in raising funds for the Be the Match prior to Sunday, poignantly shared her feelings about the event.

"It was beautiful, even more beautiful than I had ever hoped for," she told me. "And it went off without a hitch. You could feel the energy and excitement in the air. You could feel the love and unity of hundreds of people that gathered to support one great cause.

"I woke up that morning with nerves I hadn't felt in years. But lining up in the hallway with my teammates, it all just faded away, as we focused on what lied ahead. Stepping out onto that ice was magical. Skating around, seeing all of the people in the stands, up through the glass, hearing the crowd cheer, a once in a lifetime. And it was for us. But it wasn't. It was for the things that brought us all together on that amazing day: Tanner, Be The Match, and our love for hockey."

Carpenter continued.

"Hundreds of people from all over southern California, some who already knew each other, and many who did not, became family. And that day, it didn't matter who won, because we all won.

Becky Carpenter (right) having a chuckle with Kings legend Bernie Nicholls during the game (Photo credit: David Sheehan/CaliShooterOne Photography)

"We raised a ton of money, we had a ton of people get swabbed for the bone marrow registry. We succeeded. I can say with certainty that it was one of the best days of my life, and one I know I will never forget."

Overall, it was an incredible day. While the sellout crowd certainly got their money's worth from the game itself, you can be certain that they got their memories worth and then some from the event which has arguably served as a monumental achievement not only for Knights of the Forum but for Be the Match as well, who are confident that they will be on their way to saving a handful of lives after Sunday.

The work was tireless and the contributions were invaluable as the Kings community has proven just how strong they are and how deeply they care for one another as the magnitude of this event would not have been possible had it not been for each and every individual involved. While fanbases of the other 29 NHL clubs may take exception, what the Kings community has proven that, whether for Be the Match or any charitable organization, they are arguably the most eleemosynary of the collective fandom of the entire National Hockey League.

So seldom has an event generated such poignancy, such electricity like it did on Sunday at the Toyota Sports Center. Everyone in attendance surely felt the magic on Sunday, but those feelings certainly will not subside as this wonderful event promises to resonate with every single of these individuals for their rest of their lives.

Post-game group picture of participating players from both teams (Photo credit: David Sheehan/CaliShooterOne Photography)