

Tri Valley Blue Devils heat up the ice

by Dave Roberts
Staff Writer

When you think of youth sports, several come instantly to mind: soccer, baseball and softball, followed perhaps by swimming, volleyball and football. One sport that might not make most people's top 10 list is ice hockey – particularly in California, where hockey moms aren't nearly as plentiful as they are in Alaska.

But hockey is, in fact, being played by Brentwood-area kids, several of whom are headed to the state championship tournament held this weekend at the Sharks' practice facility in San Jose. They are Alejandro Lorono, who plays for the Tri Valley Blue Devils Pee Wee team (ages 12 and under), and Alex Barclay and Ethan Dodd, who play for the Devils Squirt team (10 and under).

On a recent weekend, the Pee Wee team took the Nor Cal Championship title (with Lorono scoring one of the goals) and the Squirt team swept the playoffs, taking home the top honors in its division. The Pee Wee team also won the prestigious Silverstick Tournament in Ontario, Canada earlier this year against 16 of the best teams in the United States and Canada.

There might be something in the local water as far as hockey goes, because Brentwood native Casey Wellman recently signed a two-year \$1.8 million contract to play for the NHL's Minnesota Wild. Wellman got his start playing for the Tri Valley



Photo courtesy of Leeann Lorono

The Tri Valley Blue Devils hockey team, which includes locals Alejandro Lorono, Alex Barclay and Ethan Dodd, is playing in the state championship this weekend in San Jose.

Blue Devils, which plays its home games at the Dublin Iceland rink.

Bill Davis of San Leandro has been coaching the team for 22 years and has special praise for this year's squad. "I have had some really good years, but this has been a great year," he said. "The team seems to rise to the occasion when they get to the championship game. It seems they step up

to the next level. When in Ontario playing some of the best teams in Canada and the U.S. at their age level, they stepped up and played well enough to win that tournament. It's a pretty big deal to win that tournament for a California team. This is an unusually successful year – it really is."

Asked about the Brentwood-area players on his team, Davis said, "They are

really hard workers. Alejandro is a first-year Pee Wee and will be returning next year. The other two – I believe they move up to Pee Wees next year. They are hard workers. The success of the team is right around what the kids are doing. You have some good players from that area."

Players also come from as far away as Modesto, Tracy and Stockton "because there's not a lot of ice hockey in Northern California; maybe 15 rinks total. Most people don't even know the rinks are around. It's growing in popularity, obviously, with the Sharks. The hockey in Northern California has been around since the '40s, believe it or not. There's been all levels in the Bay Area. In the last years it's really grown, thanks to the Sharks and also the Stockton Thunder pro team. That really helped develop the interest."

The youth game is similar to the pros, allowing full contact and checking at the Pee Wee level but not at the Squirt level. One difference is that fighting is not allowed – fights result in removal from the game followed by a one-game suspension.

The cost to participate is \$1,400 for a season (not counting travel), which pays for league fees, ice costs of \$325/hour and referees' fees. "It's definitely an expensive sport. That's the other reason it hasn't taken off: the cost of playing," said Davis.

For more information, go online to www.trivalleyminorchockey.com.

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