

All-Bee teams named next week

The 21st annual edition of the All-Bee basketball teams will be announced in next week's edition of The Bee. The two-page spread recognizes the best boys and girls basketball players from The Bee's coverage area, as voted on by the coaches of the teams. Be sure to see next week if anyone from your school's teams are first, second or honorable mention selections.

Former Spartans have memorable spring break

Cohen, Irish-Baker sign pro hockey contracts with ECHL teams

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

Spring break for Michael Cohen and Billy Irish-Baker has been a vacation they'll never forget.

Cohen and Irish-Baker, seniors on the Canisius College hockey team and former Williamsville North High School players, signed professional contracts last week to play in the East Coast Hockey League.

The East Coast Hockey League is the "AA" farm system for the American Hockey League and two leagues below the National

Hockey League.

Cohen, a Williamsville resident, signed with the Reading Royals while Irish-Baker, of Clarence, signed with the Cincinnati Cyclones.

Reading, located about one hour from Philadelphia, Pa., is the ECHL affiliate for the AHL's Manchester Monarchs, which is the affiliate for the NHL's Los Angeles Kings. Cincinnati is the ECHL affiliate for the AHL's Hamilton Bulldogs, the affiliate for the NHL's Montreal Canadiens.

Cincinnati is in first place in the

American Conference's North Division with 73 points. Reading is in fifth with 66 points.

"It was a great opportunity with spring break to not miss any school and get my feet wet and see what it's all about," said Irish-Baker.

"It's like a dream come true," added Cohen. "My ultimate goal is to play in the NHL but next year I want to play in the AHL. I should definitely end up playing in this league."

Both returned from spring break on Monday to complete their senior years, although Cohen said he will play his final two games with Reading this weekend against Toledo.

Each were deserving of a chance to play in the ECHL.

Cohen, a right winger, had one of the most productive careers of any Canisius player since it became Division I in 1998-99. He was the first Golden Griffin player in the last five seasons to have 20 points or more in each of his four seasons. He ranks third in school history with 100 points, accomplishing the feat with a goal against Holy Cross on Feb. 9, and is only the third Golden Griffin to reach the century mark. He also ranks third in team history in goals (42) and assists (58) and first in power-play goals (22). His 32 points during the 2005-06 season was the most since 2001-02 and at the time, ranked him fifth on the Division I single-season scoring list.

Irish-Baker, a forward, was Canisius' team captain his senior year and assistant captain his junior year. He was extremely durable, appearing in 134 games, including the last 115 which is the longest streak at the school since it has been Division I. He finished 11th in scoring in team history with 61 points. He was also 10th all-time in career goals with 32. As a freshman, he led the team with 12 goals.

Canisius College hockey coach Dave Smith, an Amherst resident, said both have had no problems playing in the ECHL.



Canisius College senior Michael Cohen, a former Williamsville North hockey player and current Williamsville resident, has played in seven games with the Reading Royals of the East Coast Hockey League.

"They were great contributors to our program and are character players," said Smith. "Those are the kinds of guys who you see in pro hockey."

Cohen and Irish-Baker were perfect fits for their ECHL teams.

"What Cincinnati was looking for was what Billy provides," said Smith. "They needed someone to play a reliable defensive role and be physical. Reading was looking for a front line player because there were decimated by call-ups to the American Hockey League and Michael fits that role."

Cohen and Irish-Baker each felt the speed of the ECHL was faster than any level of hockey they've played before but grew into their roles well.

"I play a real simple game," said Irish-Baker. "If you do the simple things and if you're not getting noticed as much, you're doing your job."

"This is the best hockey I've ever played," added Cohen. "Everyone is in the right spot at the right time. It's almost easier to play because it's not as hard when everyone is doing their job. It's instinctual."

Cohen and Irish-Baker's ECHL experiences became more memorable last Wednesday when each scored their first goals against each other. (Cincinnati beat Reading, 4-3, in overtime.)

Irish-Baker stuffed in a rebound in the second period to tie the game at 2-2. It was his only point

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Canisius College senior Billy Irish-Baker, a former Williamsville North hockey player, appeared in six games with the Cincinnati Cyclones of the East Coast Hockey League over spring break.

Powerlifting

Panthers shatter multiple school records

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

It was a record-setting New York State Championship meet for Sweet Home powerlifters.

Four school records fell at the 37th annual event held at Sweet Home High School.

Andrew Hopkins, Nick Christman, and Matt Lycett all broke school records. Hopkins broke a 23-year old record in the 220-pound division, bench pressing 320 pounds. He also edged tournament director Paul Strefeler's 19-year old record in total weight by 20 pounds (1,290 to 1,270). Hopkins was named co-most valuable lifter with Niagara-Wheatfield's Adam Ferchen.

Christman placed third in the unlimited class and set a school record in the bench press with 365 pounds. The old record was 335.

Lycett benched 225 in the 136-pound division, 20 pounds more than previous record holder Ben Usen.

Nick Terhaar and Chris Akromas placed sixth in the 200 and 220 pound divisions, respectively. Ryan Wilson was 14th at 220 pounds.

Strefeler credits the six with training in the Sweet Home weight room for its success.

"Those kids are always in the weight room before and after I'm done working out," said Strefeler.

As a team, Sweet Home placed fifth with 25 points. Churchville, who hadn't competed in the event since 1996, brought 30 powerlifters and took first with 100 points. North Tonawanda came in second with 70 points. Grand Island and Pioneer were third (60) and fourth (40), respectively. Kenmore East and Maryvale (tie for sixth, 12), Kenmore

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Chris Akromas placed sixth in the 220-pound division at the 37 annual New York State Powerlifting Championships on Saturday at Sweet Home High School. Four team records fell.

Photo by Joe Eberle
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