

## Puck 'N Hockey

### [When It Comes to Special Hockey, Everybody Wins](#)

February 11, 2011 @ 7:30 pm by [M. Richter](#)

A few days ago, Eric (who runs this fine establishment) asked if I would be interested in covering the Dreams for Kids Extreme Recess (Washington Capitals Edition) on behalf of Puck 'N Hockey. I'm still new to the world of online journalism (and media photography), but since I've done a little volunteer work with special hockey it seemed like a good way to get my feet wet in the (slightly) more serious side of things. Less than twenty-four hours after I agreed to work media for the event, the special hockey team I help out with sent around a call for volunteers for the same event, so I got to do a bit of column A and a bit of column B this afternoon.



Matt Bradley and Randy Brawley (Coach for NoVa Cool Cats) provide shooting advice.

For some context, [Dreams for Kids](#) is a non-profit which works with disadvantaged and special needs children to help give them opportunities and experiences they wouldn't otherwise consider. They started about 20 years ago in Chicago, and have since started branching out; DC is the first off-shoot of what promises to eventually be a far-reaching organization. Labor for the group is provided almost entirely by volunteers, most of whom are twenty-five or younger, and they work with other regional organizations and businesses (the visible example in today's activity being Michael & Sons) to put on a variety of events throughout the year.

Today, the [Washington Capitals](#) joined a growing list of groups that have partnered with Dreams for Kids to promote adaptive sports. Close to seventy children took part in the event, some more familiar with ice skates than others; everyone had a good time. Matt Bradley, David Steckel, and eventually Tom Poti all made their way out to join the fun during the open skating period, as well as coach Bob Woods (and, at the very tail end, Bruce Boudreau). The head-count of the

volunteers for the event was just under a hundred, and most of the media got drafted into kicking the pucks around as well at one point or another (or, maybe that was just me).



Matt Bradley, Brendan, and Brendan's Buddy

The thing with special hockey events like this is that everyone walks away a winner, and I don't say that in the "let's give each kid on the team a trophy for self-esteem building" sense of the word. Anyone who was involved in today's Extreme Recess got something positive from the experience, with the kids (rightfully) getting the lion's share.

The children, each of whom was partnered with a "buddy" to make sure that nobody slipped through the cracks, spent an hour cruising around the ice getting a feel for their skates. There were then additional skill-building drills in smaller groups, designed to introduce them to some of the basic concepts of hockey. For children with certain kinds of mobility issues, half of the rink was designated for sled hockey, with at least one mentor on the ice who is a sled-hockey participant himself. By the end of the free-skate, some were zipping around at mach 3, and some were struggling to stay upright or clinging to their buddies for dear life, but everyone definitely had an *experience*.

As for everyone else involved, there's the moral satisfaction of making someone else's life better, and there's also the benefit of visibility. One of the points of an Extreme Recess is to bring attention to adaptive sports, and the success of that endeavor can be seen in the way that volunteers seemed to crawl out of the woodwork simply because the Washington Capitals were involved. In addition, Special and Sled Hockey organizations like the [NoVa Cool Cats](#) and the [DC Sled Sharks](#) get a chance for free publicity and to initiate contact with children and families who can benefit from the work that the clubs do. I spoke with Bob Woods briefly, and he said that no matter where he's been over the course of his career, there's always been team involvement with local special hockey programs. It's one of those causes that just makes sense

for pro teams to get involved with, because everyone associated with pro hockey understands the love of hockey and has the desire to share it.

And, aside from the obvious good publicity and karma that this brings their way, what do the Capitals get out of this? Well, in exchange for donating the ice time, equipment, and food this afternoon, they get the satisfaction of knowing that the internet is going to be swarmed with pictures of David Steckel looking adorable with children. It's a fair trade off, right?



David Steckel poses with small children - this happened a lot.