



John Gillooly: It's not the glory days, but EP is back

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It was 30 years ago that East Providence High captured both the Rhode Island and New England Interscholastic hockey championships.

So you wouldn't really expect any of the teenagers wearing East Providence hockey uniforms these days to understand what it was like back in the 1970s, when East Providence was among Rhode Island's elite programs.

Three decades is ancient history to a teenager. But it turns out the Townies' current icemen not only are good hockey players, but students of history.

"They know all about those times," East Providence coach Gregg Amore said. "Every year we have an alumni game and lot of guys come back. Randy Wilson usually comes over. Ron and Brad Wilson and Tim Army can't come because they're coaching, but they always send a note and a donation for the program. Plus we have that big banner in the gym that says 1975 State and New England champion."

Nobody at East Providence today is talking about a return to the hockey heydays of the '70s and early '80s. That was when the East Providence roster was filled with graduates of the East Providence Youth Hockey Association.

Their childhood home-away-from-home had been the Dudley Richards Ice Arena, the privately-owned rink located off Newport Avenue.

"In those days, everybody in East Providence played hockey at Dudley Richards," said Amore, a 1984 EP grad and former Townies hockey star. "My father hadn't played hockey, but I grew up in East Providence so I played hockey."

But the Richards arena, now a roller-skating facility, closed some time in the mid-'70s because of high energy costs.

"I think I was part of the last group of young East Providence kids who played hockey at Dudley Richards," said Amore. "My last few years of youth hockey we played at Pawtucket. By the time I reached high school, the rink had been closed for a few years."

It's not surprising that without a local rink, the East Providence Youth Hockey Association eventually dissolved. That meant the talent pool at the city high school gradually became smaller and smaller. Amore's senior year in 1984 was the last year East Providence played in the state's top hockey division.

By the late 1990s, East Providence hockey had fallen to the bottom. In four seasons from 1997-98 to 2000-2001 the Townies had a combined record of 6-68 against Division C competition, the lowest level of Interscholastic League play. That included an 0-17 mark in 2000-2001.

"It wasn't anybody's fault. It was just a tough situation," said Amore, who's both an East Providence teacher and the Townies' baseball coach. "The coach wasn't in the school and he wasn't from the community. They were down to nine skaters. I suspect there was some talk about dropping the program."

Three years ago, EP athletic director Phil Ricci asked Amore if he would undertake the task of rebuilding the program.

"It was a tough decision," said Amore. "Our daughter had just been born and I wasn't sure if I could give it the time needed. But I said yes and we have been steadily improving. We now have 25 skaters and I even had to make some cuts this year. I hated to have to make cuts, but there just isn't enough ice time for more skaters.

"The key is keeping some of the good young players home in East Providence rather than have them go to the private school and we are starting to do that."

Under Amore's direction, East Providence steadily moved back up the Division III ladder, to the point where just about everybody else is looking up at the Townies.

The Townies, now 9-0, go into this weekend as one of only two undefeated teams in the 15-team Division III. In the nine games, the Townies have outscored the opposition 58-5. The leaders of the high-powered attack has been the top line of Louis Peterson, Patrick Gormley and Dave Hill. The trio are the top scorers in Division III-Central. Peterson heads the list with 10 goals and 22 assists. Gormley is second with 22 points (15 and 7) and Hill is third with 18 points (4 and 14).

"I have seen just about all the teams in Division II and III and I think they are as good as any line in those two divisions," Amore said.

The top matchups

The Townies will go after their 10th victory tomorrow night when they meet Middletown at Lynch Arena in Pawtucket. Also tomorrow, Scituate, the other undefeated Division III team, goes after its ninth victory against West Warwick at the West Warwick rink.

The top Division I attraction of the weekend should be at Thayer Arena tonight when second-place Hendricken plays host to undefeated division-leader Mount St. Charles in the nightcap of three-game program.

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