

'Incredible' turnout humbles family

Memorial event expected to rake in more than \$30,000 for children

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Last Sunday, the sun shined bright, spirits were high and the 7th Annual Noah Yelizarov Memorial Hockey Tournament at the Richmond Olympic Oval was a resounding success.

A new venue, a beer garden, a bigger crowd and stellar hockey made the recipe for the largest and most triumphant fundraiser yet.

The more than 400 people who came to support the fundraiser in memory of Noah, humbled his father, Michael. Noah died of electrocution in a tragic accident in Thailand in October 2004 — he was just shy of his 19th birthday.

"The turnout was incredible and we are always so grateful to everyone who comes out and supports us," said Yelizarov. "It was fantastic to be in a venue that celebrates Canada.

"To see our little event at an Olympic facility was awesome."

Although the all-day hockey tournament and dinner/auction was more than the family ever expected, the day is always bittersweet for the longtime Richmond residents.

"We miss Noah a lot at this time of year," said Yelizarov. "Seeing so many people gather together under one roof in memory of Noah makes me believe in goodness."

Another first this year was the Dunk Tank. For a \$10 donation for a bucket of balls, people took turns trying to dunk hockey players and Noah's friends, such as Jeffrey Hopkins and Nick Enemark.

Although the final tally won't be known until later this week, everyone involved believes it will meet or exceed \$30,000.

Committee member Don Taylor, who was in charge of organizing the hockey schedule, was thrilled with the oval and the caliber of hockey.

"It was a real thrill to be at the oval," he said, adding there were 24 teams, with players ranging from 18 to 50.



PHOTOS BY KATHY KLOMP

Noah Yelizarov's father, Michael, presents the trophy to the winners, Team Cole. Below, Jeffrey Hopkins waits to get dunked into the tank to raise funds for the charity.

"The Oval is a world class facility and the atmosphere on Sunday was beyond words.

"The ice is top of the line and provided for really good hockey."

The hockey tournament also attracted some professional NHL players, from the New York Rangers, Colorado Avalanche and Dallas Stars. (Raymond Sawada, a good friend of Noah's growing up plays with the Dallas Stars).

"Many of our players were the stars in junior hockey," said Taylor, the principal at De Beck elementary. "We were so proud to have David Jones, who plays professionally for the Colorado Avalanches and was the highest scorer for his team this year with 24 goals, come out again this year to support the Yelizarov family."

In the end, Taylor said, what warmed his heart the most is that the players keep coming back year after year to honour Noah's memory.

Meanwhile, after the hockey, everyone enjoyed a Greek dinner and live



auction in the Legacy Lounge, overlooking the ice rinks.

"Felicos Restaurant did a fantastic job with the food and there was more than enough for the capacity crowd that came out," said Yelizarov. "You know Lori, Jonathan and I can't do this without our incredible committee and the volunteers ... we are so thankful."

The funds raised will support Children's Hospital, Canuck Place and H.E.R.O.S.