

HOCKEY

OV camp brings European flavor to teaching game

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By **MIKE PODESTA**
ThisWeek Staff Writer

Niko Espinosa isn't from a hockey hotbed, but does have a passion for the sport.

Espinosa, 16, is from Harlem, N. Y., and has been playing hockey since he was 7.

"A lot of my friends think I should be playing baseball or basketball," he said. "They never thought I would be playing hockey."

Espinosa is one of 135 athletes that went to the OV Hockey School last Monday through last Friday at the Newark Ice Arena. His older brother, Onex Rivera, introduced him to the sport. He then started playing with an organization in New York City called Ice Hockey in Harlem, which reaches out to inner city children and tries to get them interested in playing hockey. The program is held at the ice rink at Central Park.

"My brother at the time was playing roller hockey and I really didn't like hockey," Espinosa said. "I had no feeling for hockey, but then I heard about ice hockey in Harlem and tried it out."

Espinosa now plays as a defenseman for the junior C Warriors in Brooklyn at Coney Island. The team competes at both the state and national levels. He wears the number 91 because it is his brother's favorite number.

BY JOY PARKER/THISWEEK

Anthony Donskov (left) works with Jordan Kanter last Thursday during the OV Hockey Camp at the Newark Ice Rink.

Jeff Christian now lives in Columbus, but used to be the director of the Harlem program. Because of Christian's work in Harlem and his friendship with the Donskov family who runs the OV Hockey School, Espinosa was given a scholarship to participate at the school.

In return for the scholarship Espinosa did volunteer work with the recreation and park division working with autistic children teaching them how to play hockey.

In its seven years, the school has drawn players from California, Georgia, Minnesota, Finland and Canada. Paul Donskov and his sons Misha, Matthew and Anthony run the school. All have an extensive background in hockey.

When Anthony and Misha were teammates on a junior team in Ontario, friends and fans nicknamed the pair the "OV Brothers" because of the last two letters of their last name. The nickname stuck when deciding a name for the hockey school.

Paul has coached and instructed in both Canada and in the United States. He is a Canadian NCCP Level V and Canadian National Level III coach. He is also a member of the USA Hockey, Mid-Am District, serving as an on-ice instructor and evaluator for the "select camps."

Misha is a lead instructor with the Atlanta Thrashers hockey development team. He played two years of junior hockey in the United States and Canada before playing at Miami University. He coached minor hockey in Europe and is a member of the board of directors of the Columbus Ice Hockey Club.

Anthony played two years of professional hockey for the Lubbock Cotton Kings of the Central Hockey League. He, too, played at Miami as well as three years of junior hockey in the U.S. and Canada.

Anthony is also the president of the Columbus Ice Hockey Club. He serves as a performance enhancement specialist, training professionals as well as Division I collegiate hockey players.

Matthew played four years of college hockey at State University of New York at Cortland and is sixth all-time on the school scoring list. Before playing at Cortland, Matthew played three years of junior hockey in Canada. He was a 1998 draft choice of the North Bay Centennials of the Ontario Hockey League.

Misha said he has seen the rapid growth of interest in the game of hockey in central Ohio since his family moved here from Canada in 1990.

"When I came here there was only one facility at Ohio State," he said. "Since then the Chiller has expanded. Now, there's the Worthington Ice Center as well as the Newark Ice Arena and the Fairgrounds. Hockey has really grown and continues to grow at the grass-roots level."

He said that the Blue Jackets have contributed to the interest, but his father sparked interest in the area early on.

"My dad has had a major hand in that," Misha said. "He has been in this market since 1990 and has really promoted hockey development. That's what we try to teach in our camp, too."

"There are two major things, fun and fundamentals. If you can teach those two things, (the players) are going to continue the game through their adult life and that is really the most important thing."

The five-day camp was run in five sessions: squirt (7-10), peewee (11-12), bantam (13-15), high school (15-18) and adult (18 and older). The two-hour sessions were divided into halves. The first half was devoted to fundamental skill development (skating, shooting and passing). The second half was geared toward tactical aspects of the game, such as individual and team tactics.

The Donskov's also incorporate European training which involves progressive drill sequences, over-speed and resistance training and functional exercises. It was the first year the OV Hockey School was offered in Newark. The first camp was at the Ohio State Ice Arena in 2000 and was geared toward high-school players. Paul said he was excited to have the opportunity to instruct in Newark.

"This is the first time Newark has invited a hockey school with a national reputation or any hockey school for that matter. We are very happy about that," he said.

"It was a great opportunity to come to Newark they totally re-did their facility," Misha said. "The staff was more than willing to accommodate us it was just a great fit. We have a great group of kids that want to learn. We are certainly happy."