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Showcase puts some of prep hockey's best and brightest on center stage

By Mike Moore
C & G Sports Writer

It happens once every year.

Many of the state's best high school boys hockey teams get together to play in some of the best matchups the season has to offer.

And it has nothing to do with the playoffs or hoisting a trophy of any kind.

On Feb. 9-10, 32 teams from across the state will come together at the Kennedy Recreation Center in Trenton for the seventh annual Michigan High School Hockey Showcase, hosted by the Michigan Interscholastic Hockey League. Each squad gets to play two games.

And the word "showcase" could not fit the event any more perfectly.

"That is exactly what it is," MIHL President and Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingswood coach Andy Weidenbach said. "This isn't a tournament where you win anything. We are showcasing the teams and the players involved. There are scouts from everywhere that come to watch this, and the players know it."

The Showcase features all six MIHL teams — Cranbrook, the No. 1-ranked team in Division 3, University of Detroit Jesuit, Grosse Pointe North, Novi Detroit Catholic Central (No. 2, D-1), Birmingham Brother Rice (No. 2, D-2), and Port Huron Northern — along with 26 other teams that enter the tournament by invitation only.

Other teams from the C & G coverage area competing include Utica Eisenhower, Orchard Lake St. Mary's (No. 5, D-1), St. Clair Shores Unified (No. 8, D-1) and Birmingham Unified (No. 7, D-1). Some other notables attending are East Kentwood High (No. 1, D-1), Traverse City West (No. 3, D-1), Howell High (No. 9, D-1) and, of course, Trenton High, ranked No. 8 in D-2.

"After teams submit a request to play, all of us (MIHL coaches) must agree to invite them based on their season, types of players, strength of schedule and so on," said Weidenbach, adding that they usually have to turn away six to 10 teams before



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes
Orchard Lake St. Mary's junior defenseman Dan Stanisz and the Eaglets face East Kentwood, the No. 1-ranked team in Division 1, Feb. 9 in their first game of the Michigan High School Hockey Showcase.

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finalizing the field in April. “We want the best teams in the state with the best players in the state to be here.”

Weidenbach said the Showcase began in an attempt to give high school players the exposure to scouts they so desperately needed and simply weren’t getting — as opposed to kids who were playing high-level travel hockey or were in juniors.

“The scouts have an easy time seeing some of the better players in the country,” Grosse Pointe North coach Scott Lock said of the Showcase. “A lot of teams may not get that exposure from the scouts (otherwise).”

Adding to the attractiveness of the event is the decision to delay the schedule-making process until the last possible minute so that the best possible matchups, based on the most recent state rankings, can be put together. This year’s schedule was not finalized until Jan. 11.

“In the past, we would make the schedule about two months before the Showcase,” said Weidenbach, whose team first faces Catholic Central Feb. 9. “By doing this, it just makes this whole thing that much better.”

“It just seems to get bigger and better year after year,” St. Mary’s coach Brian Klanow said. “It’s really a fun weekend for us. We are playing the top team in Division 1 to start, and playing that type of competition is great.”

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