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Photo by Bob Ronald

Clinton Township Chippewa Valley senior forward Trevor Smith takes a face off earlier this season. The Big Reds host Macomb Dakota at 8:25 p.m. Dec. 16 at Great Lakes Sports City in Fraser.

Game on

Varsity ice hockey returns to Chippewa Valley

By Brad D. Bates
C & G Sports Writer

When coach Mark Micolo went to Clinton Township Chippewa Valley looking to restart the boys ice hockey program, it was like the team never left.

Despite not fielding a varsity team in 2008-09, there was more than enough interest to get the program up and running this year.

“We started back in the spring getting kids interested because we needed a whole new team,” Micolo said. “By the time the fall season rolled along Aug. 1, we had everyone together and got going.”

Micolo had 27 players lined up for the fall league. The Big Reds reduced that number to 20 for the start of the varsity season, and Micolo said the program is well on its way to being re-established.

“I’d say we’re ahead of schedule,” Micolo said. “We tied our first league game against Anchor Bay, and we could have won it. And our win against (Harrison Township)

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L'Anse Creuse was very impressive.”

The Big Reds topped L'Anse Creuse 6-2 Dec. 2 after tying Macomb Area Conference Red Division rival Anchor Bay 2-2 Nov. 18.

Micolo said his team has been able to come together quickly because of his players' hockey IQ.

“It was a challenge, because they all had different backgrounds and had been playing for different teams,” Micolo said of the task of bringing his team together.

“We had a good summer league, though, and that was the first time everyone could get together and I could coach them.

“All of these guys know the game very well and have played travel hockey. Once they got to know each other and the system, they started having fun.”

While Micolo believes he hasn't seen his team's top effort yet, he said the offense has shown signs of being special.

“We're still searching for our identity, but we have two solid offensive lines,” Micolo said. “And in the first two games, everyone on those lines has scored a goal.

“We need to work on the defense a little because we're so young, but we're building for the future there.”

The Big Reds' top two forward lines are seniors Jimmy Gados and Chad Sills, and sophomore Zach Griener; and juniors Nick Bayagich and Connor Grossman, and sophomore Alex Wodnicki.

Senior goalies Troy Ronald and Timmy Lanza will help steady the defense, with Ronald seeing time as the No. 1.

“He's a very good fundamental goalie with great reflexes,” Micolo said of Ronald. “He knows where the puck is going to be, and he puts himself in front of it.”

The Big Reds have six sophomores and two freshmen on their varsity roster, and that youth is particularly evident on the blue line, where Brodie Hargis and Jon Rosenthal are the only seniors.

Among the young defenders, junior Joe Grzywacz and sophomore Jared Odren are Chippewa Valley's top pairing.

“Joe Grzywacz is the only player back from the last Chippewa Valley team,” Micolo said. “Jared Odren is a big, strong kid, and he has a great shot. He's on our power play, and he has a power-play goal.”

Chippewa Valley faces Utica Ford II in a MAC crossover at 2 p.m. Dec. 12 at Great Lakes Sports City in Fraser and hosts rival Macomb Dakota at 8:25 p.m. Dec. 16 at Great Lakes Sports City.

You can reach Sports Writer Brad D. Bates at bbates@candgnews.com or at (586) 498-1029.

