

Conference inspires future leaders

Ben Morgan

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE - Former NHL coach and pro hockey player Ted Nolan was in Yellowknife last week as a special guest at The Right Choice, a sport leadership youth conference organized by the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic (ASCWA).



Ted Nolan poses with Justien Klengenberg, left, and Loni Noksana of Tuktoyaktuk at the Sport Circle youth leadership conference in Yellowknife. - Ben Morgan/NNSL photo

Event co-ordinator Dene-za Antoine said it was great to have such an inspirational figure as Ted Nolan at the conference, inspiring the leaders of tomorrow as a living, breathing example of what one can achieve in life with dedication and a little hard work.

Antoine praised Nolan for his volunteer work with First Nations communities.

"I think we should all look to Ted Nolan as an example because he's focused on helping youth and I think that's a great example for us all."

The conference helps provide youth with a positive sense of direction for future leadership roles. Twenty-one students from across the NWT attended the event to learn about leadership by incorporating education and an active lifestyle in sport and recreation.

Nolan, 50, grew up in a small First Nations community in Northern Ontario. He played three seasons in the NHL in the 1980s and took on coaching after his playing career. Nolan won the NHL's Jack Adams Award as coach of the year for the Buffalo Sabres in 1997. Last season he was bench boss of the New York Islanders.

"If a skinny Ojibwa kid from a First Nations community can make it to the NHL then anybody can do anything," he said.

Nolan left home at the age of 16 to pursue his dream of playing pro hockey.

"It's a culture shock - coming from a community of 400 and suddenly you're in a huge place. It's pretty intimidating and the first instinct is often to run home where it feels safe," he explained.

Nolan said it's important for young people to believe in themselves, to be confident and strong and to understand if you work hard to achieve your goals success will eventually come to you.

After leaving home as a young hockey player Nolan cried himself to sleep for the first couple of months.

"I tell the story all the time, I was so home-sick but I really wanted to play hockey, so you have to learn to overcome that fear and that's what I hope to teach these kids today," he said.

Antoine said there were many successful and ambitious young people at the Yellowknife conference. He said one girl from Enterprise runs her own ice cream stand.

"We have youth here who want to be teachers. We have one who wants to get into psychology, one who wants to be a carpenter and a couple who want to get into finances," said Antoine.

"Our objective is really to create an awareness with youth for future leadership roles in the community," he said. "These kids are our future leaders - even if they don't know it yet."

Nolan said in aboriginal culture it's important to share stories and experiences with others.

"It's a part of who we are and the one thing that I've wanted to do since I played my first NHL hockey game was share my story with the kids of today," he said. "Hopefully it will benefit them to hear about it."