

Sticks-2-Schools Arrives in Washington

by Philip Anderson

The 2010 National Lacrosse League Champion Washington Stealth announced in prior to the 2011 season that they would be bringing their non-profit partner, Sticks-2-Schools, to Washington in January. The program was alive and well in one Everett-area middle school on Monday when Physical Education teachers from the Everett School District gathered at Heatherwood Middle School for an introduction to lacrosse, taught by 2009 NLL Rookie of the Year, Stealth forward Rhys Duch and defenseman Chris O'Dougherty.

Sticks-2-Schools is a non-profit organization that was created to fight childhood obesity by teaching kids to stay active as well as teaching team play.

“Sticks-2-Schools uses lacrosse, an extremely active sport that not only provides exercise, but also teaches teamwork, fair play, and is a great facilitator of social interaction,” said Duch. “The program provides children with another option for physical activity by introducing the sport into school’s PE curriculum.”

In 2008, the Washington Department of Health estimated that 25% of students in grades six through twelve were overweight or obese. Many factors can contribute to this epidemic that has spread across America. Unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise and bigger portion sizes are among a few. The Sticks-2-Schools program provides children with a new and fun way to stay active.

“It is not just about lacrosse, we use that as a medium to communicate the idea of staying active,” said Sticks-2-Schools Director Breanna Kernan.

“I am involved with Sticks-2-Schools in a selfish way really. I enjoy working with kids and obviously love the sport. In bringing the sport and fun to the kids, I get just as much out of it as they do,” said Duch.

With the program being a huge success in the Stealth’s previous home of San Jose, Calif., the Washington Stealth and Sticks-2-Schools program look to continue that same success in the Pacific Northwest.

“We are still working on funding but we hope to hit a minimum of 20 to 30 schools this year,” said Kernan.

The program was presented for the first time in Washington to teachers from all around the Everett School District at Heatherwood Middle School. With spectators such as Robert Polk, the Director of Activities and Athletics for the Everett School District, the teachers took place in drills and games to see what this sport is all about.

“Schools are where kids learn to live healthier lives,” said Polk. “Schools here have adopted healthier standards and with programs such as Sticks-2-Schools and PEP grants,

we can coordinate understanding physical fitness. Kids will leave here being their own physical fitness coach. This program, Sticks-2-Schools gives kids another option to be active. It can spark another interest in some kids and the understanding that variety is important in physical activity is what excites me about bringing this new program to the Everett School District.”

The teachers participated in lacrosse drills that they can pass on to their students. They learned the basics from how to hold a stick and throwing the ball to cradling the ball. Smiles and the sound of laughter filled the gym as even the older adults were having fun. Reviews of the first Sticks-2-Schools visit in Washington were positive.

“This session was very helpful today. I have taught lacrosse as a PE instructor for twelve years now. Today I learned new techniques that I can pass on to my students,” said Nina, a Physical Education teacher at Gateway Middle School.

Chris, a Health teacher from Evergreen Middle School, who played lacrosse in college, was excited that there was a program like Sticks-2-Schools. “I had a great time today and I think that the kids will have a lot of fun playing lacrosse and love the Stealth players coming into the schools to teach them more about the sport.”

Vince, a student teacher at Cedar Wood Elementary also got the chance to participate in the Sticks-2-Schools session. “The skill set, equipment and the team camaraderie are all things that makes this sport and this program unique. The ways to involve others, the variety and environment in which it is played is what excites me to teach this someday.”

The teachers were not the only ones excited after a day filled with lacrosse. “It was awesome being out there today. This is the first time we have done it with just teachers. I think it will bring a lot of credibility to teachers when they pass these skills on to students,” said Duch.

The Washington Stealth and Sticks-2-Schools hope to reach at least 20 to 30 schools this year, but would like to reach more.

“Were excited about it, the teachers are excited about it and so is the Everett School District,” said Kernan.

Fundraising is ongoing. Businesses and individuals with an interest in partnering with Sticks-2-Schools and the fight against childhood obesity should contact Sticks-2-Schools Director Breanna Kernan at (425)322-2623 or at bkernan@stealthlax.com. For more information on the Sticks-2-Schools program, visit www.sticks2schools.org.