

Hockey haven



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY GEORGE GEISE
Hockey players (left to right) Jason DiMatteo, Matt Panchich, Dr. Mike Dube and Derek Besich gather around the net at the Great Falls Ice Plex before an adult league game Tuesday night. DiMatteo, Panchich and Besich will play for the Great Falls Americans alumni this weekend against a Billings all-star team as part of a fundraising weekend for the Great Falls Community Ice Foundation. Dube is president of the foundation.

IcePlex heats up with busy weekend planned

By GEORGE GEISE
Tribune Sports Editor

It'll be hot time at the ol' rink this weekend.
Actually, the Great Falls Community IcePlex is a relatively new rink, a work in progress on Gore Hill. And it won't really be "hot" inside the building, since the heating system hasn't been installed.
But local ice advocates are hoping to showcase the progress that's been made at the privately run facility — in a show that starts Friday night and runs through Sunday afternoon.
"It will be warmer than it's ever been in the building," promised rink manager Jason DiMatteo. (The building has been insulated and that's helped a lot. It won't be long before the electricians will be in here and we'll have a heating system.)
The Great Falls Community Ice Foundation, which runs the IcePlex, recently spent almost \$34,000 for insulation at the fac-

Americans looking for coach

By Tribune Staff
Jim Keough, owner of the Great Falls Americans Junior B franchise, hopes to hire a coach within the next month or so. The Americans have been awarded a franchise in the Norpac Hockey League and will begin play in the fall of 2011 at the Great Falls Ice Plex.
"We hope to start interviewing (for a coach) in December and have somebody hired in January," Keough said this week. Keough formerly was general manager of the Great Falls Voyagers baseball team. This will be his first involvement with a hockey club.
Keough said it's possible he will sign as many as three local athletes to the Americans' roster even before a coach is hired.
Keough had planned to conduct at least one Norpac game at the Ice Plex this season, but has dropped plans for that because the current locker rooms aren't adequate.

ry, which is in its third season of operation. The money came from a \$40,000 grant from the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program.
The foundation is billing the weekend as Hockey Night in Great Falls, even though activities will extend for upwards of 24 hours. There are several hockey games scheduled, along with youth hockey demonstrations, figure skating demonstrations and even free public skating for fans.
The centerpiece of the ice activities will be two exhibition hockey games involving the best talent that's ever skated at the IcePlex. A team of Great Falls
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IcePlex: Action Friday through Sunday

FROM 1S

Americans alumni — including several former Junior A and college stars — will battle the Billings Stampede, a veteran squad that may include two former National Hockey League stars — Murray Brumwell and Greg Smith.

Those games will be played Friday night at 8 and Saturday night at 6:30. Local favorites competing for the Americans side include Brandon and Casey Baker, along with Matt and Mike Pancich, Dereck Besich, Mike Rydell and Tanner Heck.

DiMatteo, who played for the Americans Junior A team here in 1995, will be skating as will Josh Frider, an officer at Malmstrom Air Force Base who played Division I hockey for four years at the Air Force Academy.

"This guy is really good," said

DiMatteo. "He could be playing pros if he didn't have his (service) commitment."

The foundation will pay expenses for the Stampede to come here and provide the competition. Admission for the games is just \$4 for adults and \$2 for children, and refreshments will be available.

The Silver Foxes oldtimers' team will have two games Saturday afternoon against Canadian opponents, and there will be more adult games Sunday as well as a Squirt league contest.

"We want to expose the facility to as many people as possible so they know we've got a lot going on up here," said DiMatteo, who was hired last summer by the foundation to run the rink.

The facility is busy three nights a week with adult league games. There are nearly 130 men playing

on eight teams.

The facility also rents time to Great Falls Youth Hockey Association teams in the Squirt, Bantam and Midget divisions, and the once-thriving figure skating club is slowly rebuilding its ranks.

Folks who want to enjoy the ice can skate for free Saturday night after the exhibition if they have purchased a ticket. There are lots of rental skates available.

Dr. Mike Dube, who has daughters in the hockey programs and also skates himself with the guys, is president of the foundation.

The building has seating for about 700 fans and the building can hold more than 1,000 with standing room.

United Materials has begun the process of grading for the parking lot, although it likely will be a few months before paving is finished.



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