

## High school hockey teams keep it pure and simple

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The contrast was as striking as it was refreshing.

Skating on the Danbury Arena's main rink Saturday afternoon were four scholastic ice hockey teams competing in an annual jamboree -- their final tune-ups before the start of the regular season, which opens this week.

It was just hockey, nothing else. Nothing wrong with that.

Teams from Newtown, Joel Barlow, Norwalk and BBD (the Brookfield/Bethel co-op that's added Danbury) skated against one another minus any of the extracurricular activity that's part and parcel of the pro game.

None of the players littered gloves and helmets on the ice to duke it out.

They just played hockey.

There was no barrage of rock anthem cliches to fill the void and ramp up the decibel level whenever the clock paused. And -- thankfully -- there was no obligatory Gary Glitter hokeyness following goals, although one can surely expect many of those hoary noises returning for regular-season games.

The main sounds on this day were simply skates slicing through the ice, sticks hitting pucks and pucks ricocheting off the boards.

It was just the pure music of hockey, a rhythm that really needs no accompaniment.

There was no slamming of spectators' fists on the glass either. There was no need to provoke or incite. Not a single derogatory chant was heard. No goons to cheer for; none to jeer at, either.

On the occasions skaters rushed off the bench, it was for something no more benign than a line change.

There were no side attractions whatsoever. It was just hockey on the ice.

It's much different, obviously, than how the pros go about their business. Granted, there's no comparing the speed, or the proficiency of the players. The skill levels of the kids and young men in the jamboree aren't on the same plane as professionals.

The sport they play, however, is basically the same. It's just all the residual activity that make the games so startlingly different.

There were only a handful of spectators present, not the couple of hundred that have recently filed through the arena's turnstiles to watch hockey. But this was little more than a scrimmage anyway. Comparable numbers will fill the stands when the real action begins.

And it'll be something to see, especially if the jamboree is representative of the upcoming season. Bethel/Brookfield was 17-6 last year before adding Danbury to the mix and making Brookfield the lead school. That merger has provided coach Rusty Granacker with three full offensive lines and enough depth to expect an even better season.

Newtown and Barlow are up and coming teams expected to make their own kind of noise in what should be an ultra-competitive South-West Conference that also features a load of talent at Immaculate and New Milford.

And Ridgefield -- boys and girls -- are both looking for strong showings in the Fairfield Interscholastic Athletic Conference.

It'll be pure hockey. Nothing wrong with that.

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