



# MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR

Love Hockey Ireland unites Catholics and Protestants by teaching them the game that so many around the world love

**I**N NORTHERN IRELAND, A CONTROVERSIAL ruling by the Catholic majority Belfast City Council to remove the Union Jack flag from city hall caused riots in December and early January. It's a reminder that tension between the Protestant and Catholic populations is still relevant today despite years of peace between the religious groups. But it's also good timing for Stephen Lynch and Love Hockey Ireland as they attempt to grow the sport of hockey in Ireland while also helping to build the community.

LHI's new program, Skating Together Advancing Relations, will combine two schools – one Catholic, one Protestant – and for 10 weeks teach them the game of hockey, inline-style. While the kids learn to shoot and score like the pros, they will also be learning about each other's backgrounds and the

misconceptions about the other's community. The goal is to create a group of players that don't fly under Celtic or Rangers banners. "We recognize that hockey has the power to help this community," said Lynch, program coordinator for LHI. "Those children, some who would have thrown stones at each other in the street before they came through the program, will hopefully join a local club and become teammates and friends. We are growing the sport on the back of that."

LHI received 120,000 British pounds from the European Union's Peace III Programme. The money went toward buying equipment for 40 children in full gear, as well as launching sledge hockey in Ireland and providing transportation for the program. The group's long-term goal is to build an inline rink – inline is the predominant form

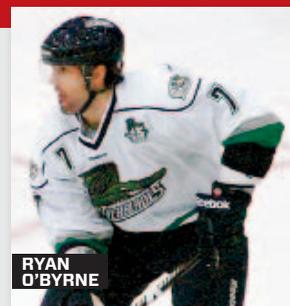
## WRITTEN IN THE S.T.A.R.

Love Hockey Ireland's Skating Together Advancing Relations teaches kids the inline game.

of hockey played because there are only two public ice rinks in Ireland – for the children to have a proper place to play. But for now, getting kids into the equipment and enjoying the sport is the first step.

Lynch sees the grant as just a kickstart to many programs LHI will offer, as it hopes in any way to help ease the tension between the rival religious communities. The program is aimed at children aged eight to 12 old in schools, 15- to 25-year-old youths and ethnic minorities.

But besides creating good relations between rival communities, LHI's first and foremost goal is to raise public awareness of the sport. Hockey isn't recognized by the National Sports Body in Northern Ireland. "Our idea has been to grow the sport and get people here excited about hockey," Lynch said. "Not in my lifetime will it be a major sport in Ireland, but we are going to get 350 children to play hockey for the first time ever. We may potentially be training more children through this than have actually ever played the sport in this country." – **ANDREW BRETHAUER**



## DOUBLE DUTY

Few had a better perspective than Ryan O'Byrne on just how complicated the lockout was.

The 28-year-old Colorado Avalanche defenseman is in his sixth NHL season and also serves as the team's player rep. He wanted to play during the lockout, but was limited in his options. "It was important for me to keep my teammates informed of where the process was," O'Byrne said. "If I went to Europe, it would be very difficult for me to maintain those responsibilities, so I thought by staying in North America I could take part in conference calls and be in contact with my teammates."

So after a stint as an assistant coach with his hometown junior team, the Victoria Grizzlies of the Jr. A British Columbia League, O'Byrne was a somewhat surprising addition to the roster of the ECHL's Florida Everblades.

After weighing his options carefully, he decided it was in his best interests to play. "It's a fine line, obviously," O'Byrne said. "There's some risk and reward, but it came to the point where I had gone eight months without playing. And if there was going to be an NHL season, it would have been a pretty quick training camp. If you haven't played, you might be at risk of injury."

"It's going to be a week training camp and then you're playing games. I felt like it was one of those things where I had to play." – **MIKE ASHMORE**