

New ringette teams include Airdrie players



By Britton Ledingham, Airdrie Echo
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U16 goaltender Mackenzie Cameron chats with coach Gareth McCullough as the inaugural U14 AA Zone Two Big Country Blaze and U16 Inception ringette teams take part in a combined practice at the Plainsmen Arena on Thursday October 1, 2015 in Airdrie, Alta. Britton Ledingham/Airdrie Echo/Postmedia Network

Ringette players in the area have two new AA teams they can compete with this season.

Five Airdrians (Alexandra Reeve, Kennedy Rice, Katie Keller, Shelby Harmes and Nicole Bushfield) have joined the new the U14 AA Zone Two Big Country Blaze .

Three others (Cassidy McRae, Mackenzie Cameron and Meagan McCullough) are playing with the recently formed U16 Inception.

Strathmore-based coach Chad Gillies is overseeing the 12- to 14-year-old players.

"It's a great bunch of girls to coach," said Gillies, a big man with a friendly demeanour. "They're all really involved, they're eager to learn."

Gillies said Ringette Alberta has wanted to expand with more AA teams in rural areas and parents and staff of associations in the Zone, including the Airdrie Ringette Association, have been trying to get a AA team for a couple of years.

"It's nice to see that we're actually trying to do it," said Gillies. "It's good for the girls."

The players, hailing from ringette associations in Airdrie, Cochrane, Strathmore and Indus, attended tryouts last month and will have two practice ice times per week, one in Airdrie and one in Chestermere.

"We are focusing on a development year for them to get them ready for the following year," said Gillies, who has coached A and B level teams for more than 10 years.

His two daughters, now 20 and 21 years old, have been on the ice since they were eight years old, and one stayed with the sport long enough to compete at the collegiate level with the University of Lethbridge Pronghorns.

So far, the Blaze has competed in one tournament in Cochrane the last weekend of September with teams from around the province.

Despite losing all five games, Gillies said he and his coaches were pleasantly surprised with the team.

"We were very competitive in pretty much all five games," he said.

"I keep preaching to the girls, 'don't look at the scoreboard, it's all about how you compete.' With some conditioning, we're going to do good."

For more information on the league, visit www.ringettecalgary.ca.

The U14 AA plays in the U16A league and the U16AA team plays in the U19A league.

Both the Blaze and Inception are set to play in the Turkey Ring tournament in St. Albert, Oct 9-11.