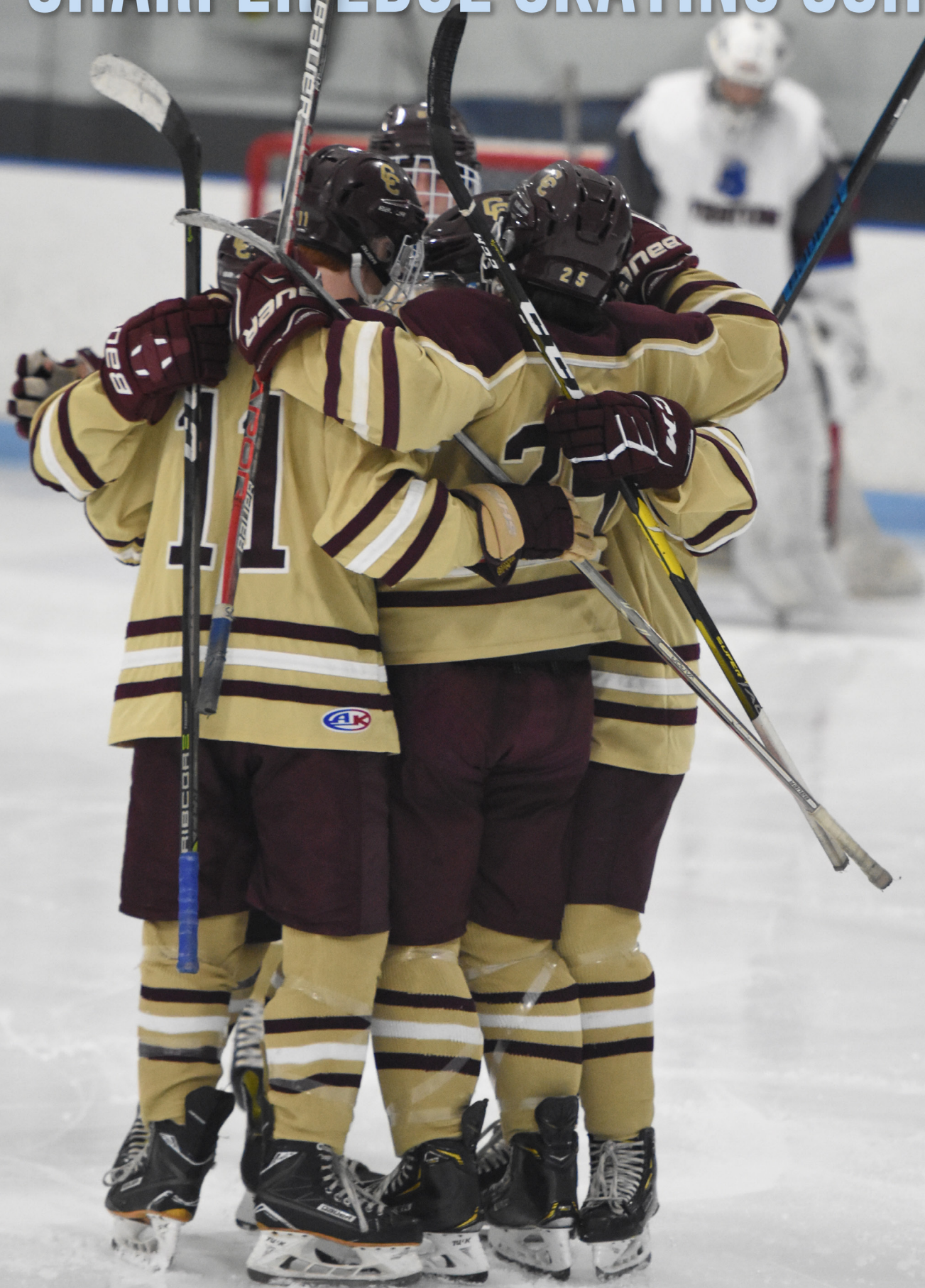


COACHING AT SHARPER EDGE SKATING SCHOOL



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“Uuh! Not again,” I thought to myself. For the fourth time in a row, Ashwin, despite his proficiency as a skater, looked straight at me and collapsed on the ice. I sighed when my fellow volunteer offered to drag him up this time. The last time he had tried to spite us, I nearly wiped out as this young boy frenetically flailed his legs. Clearly, he did not want to be taking the skating lesson. I wondered why his father passively watched the scene from the sidelines; he seemed neither embarrassed nor angry. I kept a smile plastered on my face, but I wondered why, if Ashwin didn’t want to be there, I had to be there volunteering. I stood there calmly and encouraged him firmly, “You can do it!” It was clear that Ashwin wasn’t going to drive me away. I bent over and helped him stand up, again.



instructor and I started by giving very simple and clear instructions and helped support her to ensure that she wouldn’t fall. Once she got less nervous, we started to help her learn some basic skills: marching, two-foot gliding, one-foot gliding, skulls, and backward skating. She was persistent, making small progress during each class. Although it took her the entire session of 10 weeks to be able to skate without physical support, her grin when I handed her the certificate showed that the experience had been worthwhile.

I was a different person at the end of my volunteering, having learned to adapt to any problem a student exhibited. For the kid who struggled with verbal communication, I reacted by speaking simply and directly and by looking her right in the eye. When a skater was distracted from the big TV or a noise from the stands, I distracted him from his distraction by returning to the marching rhythm on the ice. And when Ashwin threw a tantrum, I stood there calmly, showing him he wasn’t going to drive me away.



I’ll never forget my blind student Bryan, whom I worked with during the spring session last year. He was already a very adept skater. Watching him doing crossovers, I could see that he had mapped in his mind the contours of the ice rink. Skating behind him, watching his expert maneuvers, the insight hit me that if Bryan, living in utter darkness, can overcome the fear of falling on the ice, then I can certainly handle any obstacles I’ll encounter. His example of patience and self-acceptance shone brighter than any motivational speech or sermon possibly could.

At one time, volunteering at the Sharper Edge Skating School had seemed like a good idea. As a hockey player, I wanted to use my own skating skills to be an adaptive skating instructor. This program was designed to teach kids with special needs how to skate. I found the role to be more difficult than I initially anticipated, however.

My experience with Nancy, a young girl who had a speech disability, particularly challenged me. Whenever I asked her a question, she usually responded with one-word answers, and she knew nothing about how to move her body on the ice. Another

