

EuroAmerican '01 AAA Takes to Its Roots with Excursion to Italy & Switzerland

Hockey across the pond holds a special place in the heart of former Gopher, Cory Laylin. The current head coach at Hamline University spent the bulk of his professional playing and coaching career at numerous European locales. So several years ago when he expanded his EuroAmerican Hockey brand from summer clinics to also include off-season AAA programs, his hope was that one day he'd take a team to Europe - to have his players experience some of the same sights and cultures which he and his young family had grown to love.

With the help of another former Gopher, Brad Doshan and his company Eurosportours, that vision became a reality this past July 27 when many from the team, as well as parents and siblings (52 total), arrived in Milan, Italy, to begin an 8-day, 3-game adventure. The first four days were based just a short drive north of Milan in the town of Como, on the southern shore of the renowned Lake Como. Brad kicked things off in style by welcoming everyone with a hearty twilight dinner at a quintessential Italian restaurant, overlooking the lake from the high slopes of the surrounding mountain range.

The following day everyone was able to immerse themselves into the full beauty of the region with a boat excursion up the lake to the village of Bellagio, there enjoying a relaxed afternoon of swimming, strolling, and lounging. The spectacular scenery of the deep glacial lake, framed by lavish villas, copious gardens, and alluring pre-alpine mountains, more than lived up to its acclaim for being some of the most beautiful in all of Europe.

The second full day included a sightseeing trip north of the border to the city of Lugano, Switzerland, followed by some free-time back in Como to search for the perfect pizza place or gelato stand, or to hop aboard the nearby funicular for a 1600-foot ascent to the views and trails at the top of the mountain. That was followed the next morning by a four-hour journey north to Lucerne in the heart of the Swiss Alps, through absolutely stunning mountain, lake, and countryside landscapes. In Lucerne, the group received a guided tour of some of the key sights, including the famous Kapellbrücke Bridge and many other points of interest on the city's gorgeous waterfront. After a few hours, it was back to the bus to head a little south and up into the mountains (and the clouds) to the quaint resort village of Engelberg, Switzerland, for a late evening game against the EV Zug Swiss team.

After an early-morning return to Como and a short night's sleep, everyone packed their bags and boarded the bus to move a few hours to the northeast to the town of Caldaro, Italy. Located in the Dolomite Mountain range, with expansive vineyards, plummeting waterfalls, stately castles, and modern ski resorts all dotting the landscape, Caldaro showcased its eclectic mix of Italian and German heritage and architecture, all within the backdrop of its striking geographical beauty. And with a rich hockey tradition - many of the towns in the region having their own professional teams - it was also the perfect environment to drop the puck for a day/night double-header against the local SV Kaltern team, with the two sides partaking in a shared meal between games and socializing via the common language of their sport.

So after three close victories for EuroAmerican in all very competitive games, the hockey portion of the trip was over; however, there was still much yet to see and do. The remaining group time spent in and around Caldaro included, most notably: an exhilarating hike through a plunging cavern & waterfall trail; a truly unforgettable tour of the quaint family-owned Weingut Dominikus winery, a spectacular sunset/moonrise dinner overlooking the castle-rimmed and grape-filled valley; and perhaps the players' and siblings' favorite (but probably not for those few brave dads), a trip to the local ropes/climbing adventure park.

On the final full day, the bus headed for a short drive north to the larger city of Bolzano, about 40 miles from the Austrian border, where the group took-in a little of the downtown before heading off on a breathtaking gondola ride to the shops and restaurants at the top of the mountain. Finally, it was time to make the bus trek back to the southwest towards Milan for one last night again in Como, where everyone enjoyed a fabulous albeit bittersweet closing dinner on the shore of the lake.

After the meal, Cory shared a few thoughts and a thank you to the team for its many great years together, ultimately capped-off by this trip of a lifetime. Of course, he and several players and parents noted the irony – that while it was hockey that had served as the catalyst for bringing everyone there, it was also hockey that invariably and rightfully took a backseat to the vast experiences and memories of the journey... In other words, vision complete.

Note: The parents and players (as well as the 13 siblings who joined full-force in the experience) extend a heartfelt thank you to Cory and Stacy Laylin for their passion and efforts in making this come to fruition – and to Brad Doshan and his staff at Eurosportours for orchestrating the details and pulling it all together. Thank you for making it a wonderful lasting memory for all of us!

Players:

Jake Braccini

Tyler Braccini

Joe Carothers

Jack Dorholt

Ike Johnson

Tyler Kostelecky

Garrett Kothrade

Luc Laylin

Jay Lindahl

Ryne Mohrman

Cooper Olson

Everett Palmer

Evan Spadafora

Connor Winkelman

Coaches:

Cory Laylin

Bryan Braccini