

► People

# Bruins make great reading role models

## LIFELONG



## LEARNING

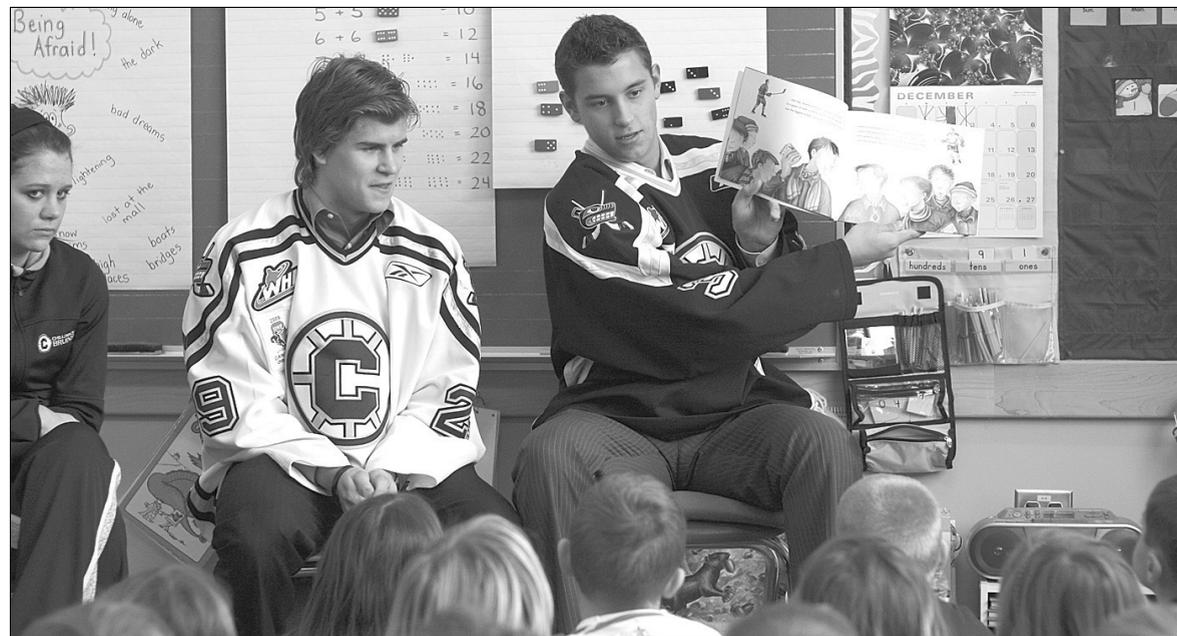
*A special series that takes a closer look at how our community is responding to the literacy challenge.*

By Aidan Chafe  
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Alexander Wiklund and Matt Strong are used to entertaining the crowd by playing hockey, but last Wednesday they sharpened their reading skills, instead of their skates, to a captive audience of listeners.

The pair of Chilliwack Bruins sat down with Betty Meiszner's Grade 2 class at Greendale elementary to read *The Hockey Card* as part of the BMO Books with the Bruins program.

"I used to read a lot of Robert Munsch," Strong, who grew up in



File/TIMES

Reading for 20 minutes a day can make a world of difference to your children's future.

Calgary, shared with the class. "Do you guys read any Robert Munsch?"

Some smiles, some nods and a few looks of bewilderment came from the students, whose eyes were firmly glued to the special guests.

Wiklund and Strong took turns reading to the students and answering any questions they had about hockey, and more importantly, about their education and the importance of reading.

"Even if you're a hockey player, you still need to be a good reader,"

said Meiszner, who reinforced the message to her students.

BMO Books with the Bruins, a literacy program now in its third year since the team's inception in 2006, runs through the entire school year. Each week Bruin players visit elementary students from grades 2 to 5 and spend an hour hitting the books, encouraging lifelong reading habits to students. Players also answer questions and sign autographs before grabbing their hockey sticks for a session of floor hockey.

It helps to back up the claim students can look to the Bruins as not only athletic role models, but as educational role models.

"These kids get to see the Bruins as students and not just hockey players," sales and community liaison Vanni De Bartolo said. "It's important for them to see that they're getting an education too."

Last year the Bruins visited more than 1,200 students in 25 local classrooms and over 50 schools in the Lower Mainland.

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Each year there are more schools that get involved, and De Bartolo says the program continually receives positive feedback.

The WHL recognized the Bruins as Scholastic Team of the Year for the 2007-08 season for their efforts in the classroom. De Bartolo says a lot of that credit goes to education advisor Maryanne Mussell, who makes sure the Bruins receive the help and resources required to perform well in their studies.

"She's done a terrific job in making sure the guys get all the help and resources they need."

Every Bruin player is pursuing some form of education, whether it's completing high school or taking university level courses.

► BMO Books with the Bruins is geared towards students in grades 2 to 5. Each school the Bruins visit receives one free ticket per student and are able to bring family and friends for a discounted price. For more info about the program contact the Bruins at 604-792-4625.

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