

Press Release
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BARRY ALMEIDA NAMED HEAD BOYS' HOCKEY COACH AT WILBRAHAM & MONSON ACADEMY

Wilbraham -- Wilbraham & Monson Academy has named former collegiate standout and professional hockey player Barry Almeida as Head Coach of its Boys' Club Ice Hockey team. Almeida will take the helm of the newly revived program for the 2021-2022 season, after being a unanimous choice by WMA's hockey committee.

"I was encouraged by the enthusiasm of all the candidates to take a lead in rebuilding the WMA Hockey program, and particularly that of Barry Almeida," said WMA's Head of School Brian P. Easler. "His passion and desire to create something special, a competitive prep school program, is exactly what we were hoping for. His playing and coaching résumé speaks for itself, but his energy and drive will really help make it all happen."

Almeida led Boston College to two national championships and played for seven seasons in the minor league systems of four National Hockey League teams. The Ludlow, Massachusetts, native is Co-Founder and Owner of Readiness Hockey and First Step Hockey School - two summer hockey camp development programs in West Springfield.

"Barry has a great vision for boys hockey at WMA," said Bill Guerin '89, General Manager of the Minnesota Wild, United States Hockey Hall of Famer, four-time Stanley Cup champion and member of the selection committee. "He is a proven winner and a person of high character. Barry is committed to developing a strong, positive culture for these young players to grow in. He's the perfect choice for WMA."

Almeida's impressive list of accomplishments as a player - paired with his talent for building hockey development programs and camps and his vast network throughout the hockey industry - will no doubt make a quick and significant impact for WMA as it progresses toward the varsity level.

"I am humbled and honored to join the prestigious Wilbraham & Monson Academy community," Mr. Almeida said. "Western Massachusetts has long deserved prep school hockey, and I can't thank the committee enough for trusting me with the growth of their program. Having the opportunity to coach alongside longtime best friend and former teammate T.J. Syner will only open more doors for WMA. T.J.'s hockey knowledge and connections are second to none. We look forward to building relationships with our student-athletes to get them closer to achieving their goal of playing hockey at the collegiate level and beyond."

Almeida was a three-time captain and assistant coach for Worcester in the New York Islanders organization through the 2019-2020 season. He also played for four seasons in the Anaheim Ducks, Nashville Predators and Washington Capitals organizations. His playing resume also includes a season with the Coventry Blaze Hockey Club in England.

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“I have known Barry and his family ever since we were kids playing for the (Springfield) Junior Pics organization,” said Kacey Bellamy, a three-time Women’s Ice Hockey Olympic medalist and member of the selection committee. “He not only stood out on the ice as a player but he was always respectful and carried himself with great character. I don’t think many people could have overcome the adversity Barry went through when he injured his eye. He continued to play D1 college and pro and excelled being one of the smartest and hardest working players on the ice. His knowledge and experience will help guide the boys’ hockey team to success on and off the ice.”

WMA also announced the hiring of Syner as an assistant coach. Syner was a two-time team captain and Hobey Baker Award nominee during his four-year playing career at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He spent six seasons playing in the minor league circuit and was an assistant coach at UMass during the program’s national championship runner-up season in 2019.

“I’m looking forward to fulfilling a lifelong dream of building our own program with my best friend,” Mr. Syner said. “With Barry’s hockey knowledge, winning mentality and résumé, WMA couldn’t have hired a more ideal candidate for the position. Together we plan on building a competitive team and culture with the hopes of developing these student-athletes for the next stages of their careers. We are excited to work closely with members of WMA and become part of the community.”

WMA last fielded a Boys’ Ice Hockey team 19 years ago, and it also plans to start a Girls’ Club Ice Hockey team next winter. A coach for the girls’ team has yet to be named. To learn more about WMA hockey and the Academy’s other programming, visit www.wma.us/hockey or www.wma.us.

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Wilbraham & Monson Academy is a transformational college preparatory middle and upper school experience for boarding and day students. Students and teachers from throughout the United States and around the world live and learn in a caring, supportive, coeducational community, enriched by a 200-year heritage of inclusion and diversity.