

Karl Subban speaks with Schomberg students for Black History Month

By **Robert Belardi**

Retired teacher, principal, and father of three NHL players Karl Subban spoke to children at Schomberg Public School last Friday.

Students from kindergarten all the way to Grade Six attended the virtual presentation.

Teacher Jennifer Watt reached out to Subban to educate her students on Black History Month as well as on wellness and well-being.

“[Watt] gets all the credit for me coming to that school. She reached out to me. She didn't stop until she was able to get in touch with me. Through the support of her principal and the administration there, she invited me on board,” Subban said.

At the beginning of the presentation, Watt introduced Mr. Subban to all in attendance.

Subban now spends his time speaking to groups, about wellness and mental health, hard work and reaching your full potential.

He began his presentation by shedding light on the celebration of Black History Month, honouring the success and achievements of Black Canadians.

He also shared that he was currently celebrating a personal achievement.

“I'm celebrating a few things: one, it was eight years ago I was in Sochi for the Winter Olympics and my son was there for Team Canada. I never saw that one coming. But we were there. The second thing I'm celebrating is P.K Subban played his 800th game in the NHL on February 7 against the (Ottawa) Senators,” Subban explained.

“I said to them, it all started with a dream. Even the trip to Sochi. That's what I mentioned to them that in my presentation, I will spend some time talking about the importance of life dreams and goals and how they help us fulfill our potential.”

He would refer to the remarkable story of the first ever Black player in the NHL, Willie O'Ree.

The 86-year-old, Fredericton, NB, native, had his jersey retired in January. O'Ree spent his entire career with the Boston Bruins from 1958-1979.

O'Ree had a dream to play hockey and play in the NHL. He was always in a conflict resolution situation. O'Ree continually faced racial backlash from fans, players and others.

“But he didn't let those things detract him. Also, he lost an eye early in his career. The doctor had told him you'll never play hockey again. Willie did not accept it. It didn't stop him from the racism, the name calling, and also being blind in one eye,” Subban said. “It didn't stop him from fulfilling his dream. I asked them, what's stopping you? From being a better person, from being a better student, from being a better athlete, what is stopping you?”

Subban, reflected on a time when his son P.K was told by a coach that he would never make it to the NHL. When he asked all the students if words had stopped P.K from making it, they all simultaneously shouted “no.”

O'Ree lived by a quote and Subban ensured that it was written so the children can read it.

O'Ree said, “If you think you can, you can. If you feel you can't, you're right.”

He quoted Martin Luther King and quoted a saying that he lives by. Subban wanted the children to know that their potential is endless. Everyone is born with it. Nobody missed out on that. It's just a matter of believing in yourself first.

Subban said he appreciated the time with the students and said everyone was fantastic.

Schomberg Public School was honoured to have Subban speak with all the children and thanked him for his time and motivation.