

Minnesota Wild Road Tour stops in Austin

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Armed with four hockey pucks just waiting to be signed, Dawn Spencer, 27, of Austin, was the one of the first in line Tuesday for the Minnesota Wild/Wells Fargo Road Tour. She had one word to describe her excitement over some of the Wild players visiting Austin to sign autographs for fans.

"Awesome."

She was one of many fans who waited in line to meet Wild players Matt Kassian and Charlie Coyle, Wild alum Antti Laaksonen and television color analyst Mike Greenlay at Wells Fargo in Austin as part of the road tour. The four were available to sign autographs and take pictures with fans.

Spencer watches the games on TV, but she was able to go to one for her birthday, "and it was great," she said.

"They don't have a bad seat in the Xcel Energy Center," Spencer said.

Also in line to see the Wild Road Tour were 67 local kids from Austin's Kids Korner. As they waited, they got to see Bruiser, the mascot of the local Austin Bruins hockey team who stopped by for a visit. Many of the kids got their shirts signed or pictures of the players, and some had even made autograph books made out of green construction paper.

Josh Strieff, of Rochester, brought his nephew Chase Streiff, of Austin, to meet and greet the Wild players. Chase plays hockey and said he goes to a lot of the Wild games as well.

"I like the Wild a lot," Chase said. "It's a pretty cool team."

Kassian, a 25-year-old left winger, was personable with the line of fans he saw Tuesday. He at least asked a question or struck up a bit of conversation with folks as he signed photos, jerseys and pucks.

He said one of the purposes of the road tour is to connect with people in small towns, since it is difficult for them to go to games.

"It's just great to be able to just get out and meet fans that maybe you wouldn't get an opportunity to see in person," Kassian said.

Coyle is still a new player to the Wild organization. The 20-year-old center was a first-round draft pick in 2010, originally chosen by the San Jose Sharks. The road tour was his first time in Austin, and he said he was enjoying it. The Spam Museum was interesting and "something different," he said.

This wasn't Greenlay's first visit to Austin; he's been here before with the road tours.

Laaksonen was with the Wild from the beginning, when the club started more than a decade ago. It was his first time in Austin, as well, but he's no stranger to southeastern Minnesota. He said he goes fly fishing in the Rochester area and he likes to find new places to go.

"It's just great to see the whole state is behind the team," Laaksonen said.