

RAIDERS PLAYOFF PREVIEW

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McNiven making most of hometown stint

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

There's a point in time, just before the drop of the puck to start the game, when netminder Michael McNiven takes a moment to think of someone very dear to him.

McNiven, a Georgetown native who doesn't turn 17 until July, is described by most close to the team as "mature beyond his years."

He credits his grandfather, the late Donald 'Jim' McNiven, with being his biggest supporter in a blossoming junior hockey career after having been named to the Ontario Junior Hockey League's All-Prospect First Team last week.

Jim, who never missed a game or practice of Michael's, passed away in December and on the day he died, Michael was in goal for the Raiders in a 5-1 victory in Hamilton over the Red Wings. Two nights later, on the eve of Jim's funeral, the star pupil posted the second of five shutouts he's earned this season

in a 3-0 win over Burlington.

"Before every game, I do everything the same that he wanted me to do. I keep a place in my mind for him and put that somewhere special," said McNiven, whose dad Mike was a goalie for the Raiders and uncle Garry, a forward, played Jr. A here for a couple of seasons in the mid-1990s.

"My grandfather knew the game well and actually worked for the Raiders a while back. He knew I could push myself harder to be better. Now I'm up to Jr. A and hopefully I'm going to play at a higher level because of him."

Drafted in the fourth round by the Owen Sound Attack in last year's Ontario Hockey League Priority Selection, the Grade 11 Georgetown District High School student started the season in the Scenic City, but returned to Georgetown just as projected 19-year-old starter Michael Stiliadis decided to head west to play for the RBC Cup host Vernon Vipers. (Stiliadis has since been dealt to the

Dauphin Kings of the Manitoba league).

On a Raider team that struggled through the first half of the season, McNiven has provided stability and the team surged up to third place in the South/West Conference standings in the final month of the schedule as he posted a 21-10-0 record with a 2.60 goals against average and a .916 save percentage.

"Michael isn't a normal 16-year-old," said Raiders' fourth-year head coach & GM Greg Walters.

"He's six-foot-two, 210 pounds and he plays the puck well. He's such a confident kid and I'd put him in the top four goalies in the league. It's not a thing about age with him. It's about knowing how to win and we certainly don't treat him like he's 16."

During a recent break in Georgetown's schedule, McNiven joined the Attack for a road trip through eastern Ontario and though he didn't see any game action, he served as a backup in a couple of games,



Georgetown Raiders' goalie Michael McNiven and defenceman Tyler MacPherson keep Milton's Josh Pace away from a loose puck during game two of their Ontario Junior Hockey League opening-round series last Friday at Milton's Memorial Arena. The Raiders lead the best-of-7 series 2-0.

Photo by Brian Watts/OJHL Images

including an eye-opener in front of 10,000 fans at the Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa on Family Day.

"(Owen Sound) was a great experience, but it was a smart decision to come back home and play for the Raiders," he added.

"When I was told I was going to play here I was really happy. I've played in about 30 games, which is a lot more than I would've played up there. I've got lots of family and friends here and they come out and watch us play. It's great to have them supporting me."

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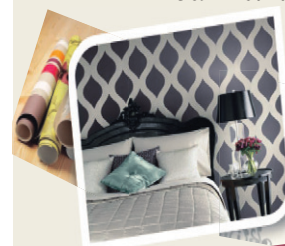


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