

# Bantam AE Rangers rebound for OMHA title

*Oakville bounces back from lopsided loss in opener to take next three games*

By Herb Garbutt  
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

All season, the Oakville bantam AE Rangers had found a way to rise to the occasion and deliver in the big game.

So the opener of their Ontario Minor Hockey Association final was the perfect stage. The Rangers were playing the Stoney Creek Sabres, a team they had not beaten all season and just add a little bit more to the occasion, they were invited to play the game as part of the Minor Oaks Hockey Association's 50th anniversary celebration.

So when Stoney Creek skated to a 5-1 victory, the Rangers had to be a little nervous.

"We had a difficult time with Stoney Creek all season so when it came down to losing 5-1," said Rangers' coach Dave Bessant, "yeah, there was a bit of concern."

With the opportunity to practice

three times before their next game, Bessant focused on something he and his coaching staff had noticed. They went to work breaking down the Sabres' breakouts and in Game 2, the players used their speed to their advantage as they perfectly executed what they learned, winning 4-1.

"(Stoney Creek) had a tough time getting the puck out of their end and our counter-attack gave us more scoring chances," Bessant said.

After taking the series lead with a 3-2 overtime victory, the Rangers' coach saw all he needed to before Tuesday's game even started.

"The warm up was completely different," Bessant said. "Our guys were louder and their confidence level was going through the ceiling. Stoney Creek, you could see, was just trying to figure out what was happening."

The Rangers jumped out to a 2-0 first period lead — the first time in the final that Oakville had scored the

game's first goal. Though Stoney Creek would cut the lead to one, Oakville would score goals a minute apart before the end of the second period and then added two more for good measure in the third to win the OMHA title for the second year in a row.

"To lose that first game and come back and win the next three was pretty incredible," Bessant said.

After losing seven players from last year, Bessant knew the team could not play the same style that led the team to the championship a year ago.

"Last year's team was more potent offensively," he said. "I knew the team wasn't going to have the goals it did last year so we were going to have to be more sound defensively."

And the team responded, allowing just 101 goals in 72 games, for a goals-against average of 1.40 this season.

That strong defensive play allowed the team to bounce back when its play-  
See Bantam, page 36



MICHAEL IVANIN / OAKVILLE BEAVER

**GET YOUR OWN BALL:** Daniel Mante protects the ball from Mazin Abdo during the three-on-three basketball tournament at the Oakville Basketball Club last Saturday.

## Fanelli training for triathlon to raise funds

Continued from page 34

help out. They were on the ice with him when his helmet flew off and the Aud fell silent on Oct. 30, 2009.

They sat beside him at the program launch, wearing Head Strong T-shirts and taking questions.

"Me and Ryan, we just want to be there for him," said Landeskog, the Rangers' captain.

Dan Lebold, the Rangers trainer who helped save Fanelli's life, was there too. So were most of his coaches and teammates, like Cody Sol and Mike Morrison. His agent, Waterloo's Rob Hooper, also watched Fanelli's winning performance in front of the media.

Things are about to change for Ben Fanelli again. He used to be the kid who missed the party to go to hockey.

"Now, I'll miss the party because I have to train for the triathlon," he said.

He will do a 750-metre swim, 30-kilometre bike ride and 7.5-kilometre run. That's his agenda in Milton on June 5. There will be no skates involved.

"After three or four concussions, parents think their kid's sporting career is finished," said Harry Zarins, executive director of the Brain Injury Association of Canada. "This is a prime example that you can switch into another sport. You don't just stop being active."

If hockey won't change, the Ben Fanellis of the world have to. Just don't ask him to testify in the case against hockey. It's not his duty. He's been through enough.

The game goes on. You take your chances.

One shift, your whole career is ahead of you.

The next shift, you're a triathlete in training. If you're lucky.



DAVID BEBEE / METROLAND MEDIA GROUP

**TEAM EFFORT:** Kitchener Ranger teammates, Gabriel Landeskog (left) and Ryan Murphy (right) were on hand to support Ben Fanelli (centre) as he launched Head Strong: Fanelli 4 Brain Injury Awareness in Kitchener earlier this month. Fanelli intends to compete in a triathlon in June in Milton to raise money for the program, which will assist people recovering from brain injuries.

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