

## Abbey Park, Loyola, Ridge claim Halton hockey titles

### Loyola boys denied Tier 2 crown in controversial finish

Maybe third place is the charm for Abbey Park High School's boys' hockey program.

After finishing behind two other teams in the Halton regular-season standings, the Eagles won the regional Tier 1 title with a 3-1 victory over the Holy Trinity Titans in the last of four Halton finals Friday at Sixteen Mile Sports Complex. It's Abbey Park's first Tier 1 boys' hockey crown since 2004, when the school was known as Queen Elizabeth Park.

"The last time I won the Halton championship, we were in third, too. Losing is under-rated," said long-time Abbey Park coach Larry Rinaldo. "Because of our losses, everyone came back and improved things... You get a lot hungrier when you're behind."

Friday's win guaranteed Abbey Park a berth in the upcoming Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations AAA/AAAA championships, which will be contested March 18-21 in Oakville. The Eagles will visit Hamilton's St. Jean de Brebeuf today (Wednesday) in the Golden Horseshoe Athletic Conference championship game, which has OFSAA seeding ramifications. Brebeuf defeated Trinity 3-1 Monday in the GHAC semifinal to earn the conference's other OFSAA berth.

The Eagles and Titans were tied 1-1 in the third period Friday before Abbey Park broke the game open with two goals in 14 seconds. Eagles captain Alex Cox scored 3:05 into the final frame and Chris Boushy followed up with a breakaway marker.

Joel Matson scored Abbey Park's first goal, with Vic Christiansen replying for Trinity in the second period. Eagles goaltender Matt Barth came up big in the final period, helping the Eagles kill three minor penalties — including a lengthy five-on-three.

"We knew our potential," said Cox, whose team entered the Halton playoffs with a 7-3-1 league record. "We knew if we played our best game, there aren't many teams that can beat us."

Trinity was the seventh seed in the playoffs after going 4-5-2 during the regular season.

"The whole second half of the season, we've never had a full lineup. But I told the guys that when we have a full lineup, we can beat anybody in this league," said Titans

coach Aaron Consoli.

"(Our guys) showed up when it mattered. I couldn't be more proud of these guys."

#### Different cast, but Loyola girls repeat

Despite turning over almost the entire roster because of the rule banning rep players that came into effect this year, the Loyola Hawks managed to defend their Halton girls' hockey Tier 1 title with a 5-1 win over the Nelson Lords.

"It's pretty special to win a Halton championship with two totally different teams," said Loyola coach Dave McNamara. "These aren't rep players; they're not house league players. They're Loyola Hawks. We've always been a really hard-working team that won't quit. They bought into the culture we had created and continued it."

It was one of the three returning players — and one for whom the Hawks really are a family — that led the way. Bridget O'Neill, the last of four sisters to play for Loyola and the third to serve as

the Hawks' captain, scored Loyola's first four goals of the game.

"That's a tell-tale sign of greatness when a player steps up in a big game like that," McNamara said. "She threw the team on her back today and carried us."

Sara Riolo scored Loyola's other goal, and Paige Saunders carried a shutout into the third period.

Within minutes of the final buzzer, the Hawks were receiving congratulatory tweets from former Loyola players stretching from Windsor to the west coast.

The Hawks won't lose many players next year, although O'Neill will head south of the border. She won't be wearing blades, however. She'll attend Dartmouth University on a track scholarship, and if she displays the speed she did Friday, she won't have won her last championship.

O'Neill will not be the first of this year's Hawks to leave the country. McNamara collected one extra medal, which will be packaged up and mailed to Hungary for Julia Inotay, an exchange student who played for Loyola before returning home at Christmas.

The Hawks were slated to host Hamilton's Bishop Tonnos yesterday (Tuesday) in the GHAC final.

“  
Losing is under-rated.  
Because of our losses, everyone came back and improved things.”

”

Larry Rinaldo  
Abbey Park boys' hockey coach



The Halton Secondary Schools Athletic Association held its hockey finals Friday at Sixteen Mile Sports Complex. Above, Abbey Park captain Alex Cox keeps the puck from a Holy Trinity opponent. Left, Loyola's Bridget O'Neill — who scored four goals in the girls' Tier 1 final — pulls away from Nelson defenders.

| photos by  
Riziero Vertolli —  
Oakville Beaver —  
@Halton\_PhotoG

The winner of yesterday's game will represent GHAC at the OFSAA girls' AAA/AAAA championships in Sudbury.

#### Disputed goal decides Tier 2 boys' final

L.B. Pearson Patriots are the Halton high school Tier 2 boys' hockey champions, but some Loyola Hawks supporters might dispute the fact.

Patriots' Mason Sheppard's wrist shot from the face-off circle deflected off Loyola goalie Matt Lunder, but what happened next is open to discussion.

After officials huddled, they determined the shot went in rather than off the post, giving the Patriots a 4-3 win in double overtime.

Loyola players, especially Lunder, were outraged, rushing the officials to voice their displeasure.

Loyola coach Larry Litzgus, moments after the game, said the referees made no attempt to explain their ruling to him.

"A couple of students from another school

were behind the net and said it didn't go in," said Litzgus. "I don't understand why in games like this they don't have a goal judge behind the net."

Loyola, normally a Tier 1 calibre team, lost too many one-goal games in the first half of the season and were relegated to Tier 2.

"It was a very disappointing first half," said Litzgus. "But we won seven games in a row and this would've been eight."

The hero of the game, Sheppard, had no expectations of scoring.

"I was just doing what I'm supposed to do, taking the shot, working the system, and it just went in," said the forward, who collected a loose puck, kicked it up to his stick, and fired before a Loyola defenceman could get to him. "I don't even know if it went in. Some of my teammates said it did, some said it didn't."

The controversy took the spotlight off an exciting regulation portion of the contest,

see Absence on p.20