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Sports

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A-Buzz with anticipation

Oakville's junior B lacrosse team features plenty of returnees

by Jon Kuiperij
 Beaver Sports Editor

Junior B lacrosse teams typically don't get the opportunity to build on what they accomplished the previous season.

Veteran players often graduate to the senior ranks, while elite young talent has the option of moving up to junior A.

So, with nearly 20 returnees from last year's Oakville Buzz team that came one strong period away from advancing to the Ontario Lacrosse Association's Eastern Conference final, Buzz general manager Ken Gillies is excited about the team's chance to pick up where it left off.

"There's definitely a strong presence of coming into this season on a high note," said Gillies, whose squad opens the 2014 campaign tomorrow (Friday) with a 7:30 p.m. home game against the Mimico Mountaineers at Oakville's Toronto Rock Athletic Centre.

Last year, the Buzz was fourth in the East with a 12-8 regular-season record before winning its first-round playoff matchup and giving the top-seeded Clarington Green Gaels a scare in Round 2. Oakville won the first two games of the best-of-five series, then held a 7-5 lead through two periods of Game 4 before the Gaels rallied to win 11-9. Clarington went on to edge the Buzz 6-5 in the decisive fifth game.

"We definitely felt good about the season, somewhat overachieving even though we didn't finish off the Gaels like we wanted to," Gillies said. "But at the same time, we don't want to be satisfied. That got us started, but there's still a big mountain to climb."

Offence

The two major departures up front are 2013 leading scorer and MVP Greg Campbell (taking the season off to focus on hockey training) and 21-points-in-five-games veteran Todd Nakasuji (age graduation). But eight of the club's top 10 scorers from last season are back, including Troy O'Donnell (28 goals, 22 assists in 15 games played), Eddie Renaud (20 G, 24 A in 14 GP), Foster Cuomo (15 G, 28 A in 14 GP) and playoff MVP Keyan McQueen (12 G, 12 A in 8 GP).

Gillies also expects youngsters Robert Hudson, Mac Forde and Dalton Follows to

be key offensive contributors. Hudson averaged nearly a point a game last year as a rookie with the Mississauga Tomahawks, while Forde — picked sixth overall in this year's junior A draft by the Brampton Excelsiors — and Follows were affiliate players for the Buzz in 2013.

Defence

A veteran group of defenders will be anchored by 21-year-old captain Colton Watkinson, who Gillies considers "one of the top defensive transition players in junior B." Paul Roakoczy, also 21, is back for his fourth year with the Buzz, and 19-year-old Justin Martin will be leaned on heavily until Watkinson returns from school next month. Jake Nyhuus and Jimmy Shea are two other defencemen who will turn 20 this year.

"We should be known as a back-door team," Gillies said.

Goaltending

The Buzz's biggest transition this year will be in net, where the team features two new goaltenders. Six-foot-six, 245-pound Josh Falkenstern appears to have the starting job, with

Oakville native Errol Spring — who helped Mimico reach the under-16 field lacrosse national championships last season — backing him up.

"It's always nice to have a veteran in net," Gillies said. "And Errol has looked very good in camp. We're happy with him as a rookie coming in to supplement Falkenstern."

Last year's No. 1 goaltender, Brent Noseworthy, broke his leg playing hockey and is out for the season.

Coaching

Mike Bentivegna, a member of the 2006 Founders Cup national champion Buzz team, takes over behind the bench from Sam Rook.

"Mike's been with us (in a coaching capacity) for five or six years," said Gillies. "I'll be helping out with the offence and Cam Watts will help out on the defensive side."

Bentivegna was also an assistant coach of the Oakville midget AAA Rangers hockey team this past season and will take over the head job of the midgets in the fall.

Rook, who was the Buzz's head coach for four years, is now the team president, a role that should allow him to spend more time with his young family.

“There’s definitely a strong presence of coming into this season on a high note.”

Ken Gillies
 Oakville Buzz general manager



Foster Cuomo, pictured in action last year against the Mimico Mountaineers, is one of nearly 20 returning players to the Oakville Buzz junior B lacrosse team this season. The Buzz opens the 2014 campaign tomorrow against Mimico at Toronto Rock Athletic Centre. | **Oakville Beaver file photo**

Oakville researcher concerned about long-term impact of soccer headers

by Jon Kuiperij
 Beaver Sports Editor

Having served as the last line of defence for nearly two decades, Monica Maher considers herself to be one of the lucky ones.

"Keepers and defenders are at the most risk for concussions," said the long-time soccer goalie, who is now pursuing her masters in neuroscience at the University of Toronto.

"I've been fortunate enough to never have had a concussion."

Concussion may be the buzzword when it comes to athletes' mental health these days, but Maher warns soccer players might have something else to worry about as well — something that might not rear its ugly head until much later in their lives.

The Oakville resident recently teamed with Dr. Tom Schweizer, director of the neuroscience research program at Toronto's

St. Michael's Hospital, to author a review about the cumulative impact of heading a soccer ball. In the study, which appeared in the medical journal *Brain Injury*, Maher and Schweizer concluded more needs to be determined about the long-term cognitive and behavioural consequences for athletes who subject themselves to multiple sub-concussive head impacts (blows to the head that do not cause concussion symptoms).

Maher has since begun working on a project that specifically examines the long-term potential impact of heading soccer balls on a regular basis. Limited research that already exists shows heading may contribute to cognitive decline or impairment, with one study of professional soccer players showing those who executed the most headers did poorest in tests of verbal and visual memory as well as attention.

"The theory is that an accumulation of



Monica Maher

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