

OHL hockey

By Tom Gavey

The Intelligencer

For 13 seasons Belleville hockey fans have been treated to what is considered the most exciting hockey this side of the NHL — major junior hockey.

It was in 1981 that the Belleville Bulls entered the Ontario Hockey League and quickly made a name for themselves.

During the 1981-82 season they set a record for most points and most wins by an expansion team.

One year later they were the first second-year team to advance to the playoffs. They haven't missed the post-season since.

The OHL is a feeder league to the NHL, with more graduates in the NHL than any other source of players, be they junior leagues in Western Canada and Quebec, Europe or the United States.

Belleville has sent players like Marty McSorley, Dan Quinn, Craig Billington, Bryan Marchment, Darren McCarty and Scott Thornton to the NHL.

Meanwhile, future stars like Eric Lindros, Brian Bellows, Tony Tanti, Doug Gilmour and Steve Yzerman all visited the Quinte Sports Centre with opposing OHL teams.

This year a number of Bulls are expected to begin their journey to the NHL, with Richard Park a projected a first-round draft choice and Craig Mills, Brian Secord and Marc Dupuis also rated by NHL scouts.

As important as producing pro players has been (and there are also Bulls' grads in American Hockey League, International Hockey League and East Coast Hockey League, as well as in Europe) Belleville has also been a developing ground for future scholars.

A sizable number of Belleville grads have moved on to Canadian university hockey, including Dean Haig, Paul Henriques, Rob Crocock, Kent Brimmer, Ken Rowbotham, Greg Dreveny, Craig Fraser, Norm Batherson and Craig Kitchener. Bulls grads have played important roles on national champions from York University and Acadia University.

Belleville's most successful regular season came in 1984-85, when they finished second in the Leyden Division with a 42-24 record.

However, it was in 1985-86 season that the club had its most memorable campaign. After finishing second again in the Leyden Division, they knocked off the highly favored Peterborough Petes in the playoffs and ad-



Dr. Robert L. Vaughan

vanced to the OHL final before falling to the eventual Memorial Cup champion Guelph Platers.

Dave MacLean continues to hold the team record for goals in a season (64) and points (154). Mike Bishop posted the best goals against average, with a 3.47 mark in 1985-86.

Ownership of the team has been the domain of Dr. Robert Vaughan since the club moved from Tier Two to the OHL in 1981. Early partnerships with

Both Dr. Robert Vaughan and Larry Mavety have been inducted to the Belleville Sports Hall of Fame.

Belleville businessman Bob Dolan and hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky have dissolved and Vaughan now owns the vast majority of the club's shares.

For 11 of the club's 13 seasons Larry Mavety has been both coach and general manager. For two seasons Danny Flynn held both titles, with assistance from Shawn MacKenzie.

Belleville has hosted one league all-star game (1982-83) and this spring will host the annual OHL Priority Selections. It's then teams in the league select the most promising 16-year-olds in the province to stock their teams in the future. It will be the first time the draft has been held east of Toronto.

The club is heavily involved in the community, working with several charities throughout the year, including the Kidney Foundation, Lung Association and the RCMP fight against illegal drugs.

Games are played each Saturday and selected Wednesday nights at the Quinte Sports Centre from September until March. Playoffs commence after that.

The league also has its games broadcast on Saturday afternoon Global TV telecasts and on TSN at various times during the year.