

New look for OHL in 1994-95

By Tom Gavey

The Intelligencer

The Ontario Hockey League is embarking on a new era this season, its first with a three-division format.

However, it's more than the divisional changes that make this year different from any of the previous 14 the Belleville Bulls have participated in.

Over the summer there were unprecedented changes in the faces who run many of the Bulls rivals. Gone are such mainstays as North Bay's Bert Templeton, Ottawa's Brian Kilrea (although he remains as 67's GM), Oshawa bench boss Rick Cornacchia, Detroit's Jim Rutherford, Sault Ste. Marie's Ted Nolan and here again, gone again Wayne Maxner.

Gone also are veteran stars like Keli Corpse, Rod Hinks, Aaron Gavey and Drew Bannister.

Here are our fearless predictions for the OHL's East, West and Central Divisions.

East Division

North Bay cruised to the division title and OHL championship last season and although they may have to work a little harder this time around, expect them to repeat. Don't underestimate the value of long-time coach and GM Bert Templeton, who has been replaced by Shane Parker. But, Parker has the bulk of the OHL's best team back, including impressive sophomore netminder Dave Roche. Scoring will be no problem with the likes of Vitali Yachmenev (61 goals), Lee Jimman (101 points) and Scott Cherrey. Brad Brown and Corey Neilson will be back to anchor the blueline.

Go up and down this division and it's tough to find a team with more depth down the middle and on defence than the Belleville Bulls. Richard Park, following his first NHL camp, should be ready to bust loose and Brian Secord and Corey Isen are proven OHLers and rookies Dan Cleary and Larry Paleczny both enjoyed stellar pre-seasons. On the blueline an embarrassment of riches includes Marc Dupuis, Dan Preston, Steve

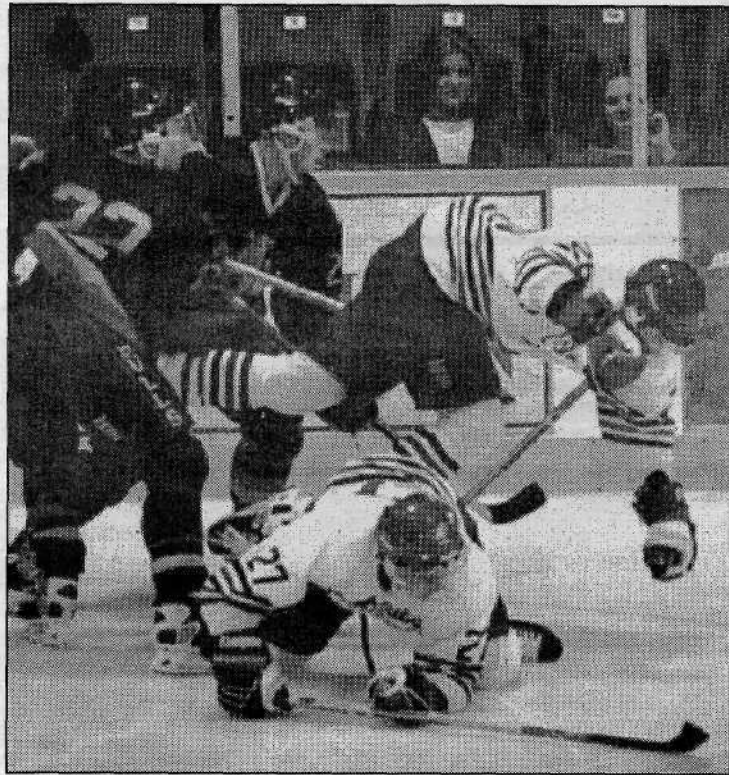
Carter, Radim Bicanek and the vastly improved Sean Brown. A big boost has been the play of rookie goaltender Kory Cooper. Belleville needs to find some wings to go with Craig Mills and Jeff Ambrosio, one of the answers appears to be Belleville native Steve Tracze.

Many believe Gary Agnew got a raw deal in London and he'll prove it this year behind the bench with the Kingston Frontenacs. He'll have no problems in net as long as Tyler Moss remains healthy. Sophomore Chad Kilger appears poised to join the league's elite and was the Fronts best player in the playoffs last year. A pretty good supporting cast includes pesky David Ling and possibly bruising Brett Lindros. Craig Rivet should again anchor a decent blueline.

Oshawa Generals scooped defenceman Mike Ware in the first round of the June midget draft and he was probably the most talented player available. He was still around because of doubts he would play for anyone but new Gens coach Stan Butler. The former minor hockey major domo will need Ware's help. Only one of the Gens top four scorers from last year is back (Marc Savard) and Oshawa wasn't overly impressive last season. Joel Gagnon provides solid goaltending.

In a division that, as is tradition, should be tight, the Ottawa 67's could finish literally anywhere in the pack. Peter Lee enters his first season as head coach depending heavily on returning forwards Sean Donovan and Steve Washburn and last year's number one pick overall, Alyn McCauley who was slowed by injuries. Other key returnees include Mark Edmundson, Dave Nemirovsky and Jeff Salajko in goal.

The rebuilding job continues for the Peterborough Petes, who should benefit from a lot of early picks in last June's draft. Sophomore sensation Jamie Langenbrunner should return from Dallas along with impressive sophomores Mike Williams, Dan Delmonte and hulking vet Matt Johnson. While this might be another down year for the



Belleville and Oshawa--East Division rivals.

Petes, look out, they never stay down for long and in another year the kids will have matured.

Central Division

There wasn't a better goaltender in the OHL last year than Matt Mullin and his return gives the Sudbury Wolves a leg up in the Central. Come to think of it, there weren't many better defencemen than Jamie Rivers (121 points). Up front, Glenn Merkosky can still count on Zdenek Nedved (50 goals), Barrie Moore (36 goals) and wild card Luc Gagne, who was Newmarket's number one pick in 1993 but was traded to move closer to a French-speaking school.

Veterans are dotted throughout the Kitchener Rangers lineup and that should carry them to second place. Top scorer Trevor Gallant is back, along with Stirling's Eric Manlow and 26-goal scorer Wes Swinson. Question mark for the Rangers? Can Travis Riggan show the ability that made him Belleville's

number one pick in the '93 draft. If so, he'll be worth the second round pick the Rangers gave up to get him.

The team with the best one-two goalie tandem in the OHL may not have either to open the season. Jamie Storr may stick with the L.A. Kings while Kevin Weekes was a training camp holdout from the Owen Sound Platers. There are some good overage possibilities here to compliment returnees Wayne Primeau and they include Jason MacDonald (55 goals) and Jeff Kostuch (30 goals).

If the Guelph Storm get both Jeff O'Neil and Todd Bertuzzi back from NHL camps, move them up at least a notch. If not, it will be a long season in Guelph. New coach Craig Hartsburg has never run a team before.

Niagara Falls Thunder are hoping to bounce back from last year's finish in the cellar of the Emms Division. The keys to that are Ethan Moreau (44 goals) and NHL first rounder Jason Bonsignore, who so far hasn't lived up to his press clippings.

GM Randy Hall does not have one of the OHL's better track records and this could be his last chance.

West Division

Led by the epitome of character player, Todd Harvey, we believe the Detroit Jr. Red Wings can capture a second consecutive division championship. The return of overage goaltender Aaron Ellis is a bonus and people like Sean Haggerty, Bill McCauley and Jeff Mitchell have been through the wars. Coach and GM Paul Maurice did a great job in his rookie season.

Yes, we know all the stars have gone away. Still, the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds are one class organization and Danny Flynn may have enough left for one more push at the top. Steve Sullivan will have to carry a lot of the offensive load, along with Deseronto's Andrew Clark. A lot of games will be saved by goaltender Dan Cloutier.

The Windsor Spitfires are hoping to have stellar defenceman Ed Jovanovski back from the NHL's Florida Panthers and if so they should rebound from a dismal 1993-94. Big Dave Roche, the former Peterborough star, appears set to take over as the Spits leader both offensively and in the dressing room. Coach Mike Kelly was an assistant in the AHL and with the London Knights.

Let's face it, things couldn't have gone much worse for the Sarnia Sting last year. They were then the Newmarket Royals

and they were awful. Returning coach Don Boyd should get some help from sophomore Aaron Brand, a healthy Larry Courville and veteran netminder Todd Laurin.

It's a cinch the London Knights won't have Jason Allison back and that just about says it all. There's little for new coach Mike Fedorko to work with, other than 28-goal man Chris Brassard.



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