

Oshawa looks like the team to beat

OHL season
s always full
of surprises

by Tom Gavey

the Intelligencer

A year ago who had heard of Daniel Cleary or Bryan Berard?

Would anyone have given the Oshawa Generals more than a passing glance in the Ontario Hockey League's East Division?

It's both individual and team surprises that are the spice of life in junior hockey and 1995-96 should be no different.

Here's an attempt to predict where the teams will finish in each of the OHL's three divisions, with last year's regular season record in parenthesis.

EAST DIVISION

Marc Savard came out of nowhere last year to win the OHL scoring title and he was just one of the **Oshawa Generals** (40-21-5) youngsters who flourished under coach Stan Butler. The Gens have almost their entire cast returning, including former first rounders Ryan Lindsay and defenceman Jeff Ware, a Maple Leafs prospect.

Those who saw the **Peterborough Petes** (26-34-6) during the preseason saw a return to the big, dominating Peterborough teams of the past. Large defenceman Kevin Bolibruck and goaltender Zac Bierk will anchor an excellent defensive hockey team. They may have trouble scoring goals, although look for the likes of veteran Mike Williams to bust loose. The rebuilding job, begun when Dick Todd left for the NHL, is over.

A solid group of legitimate OHL stars, led by Dan Cleary, Craig Mills and Joey Coombs means the **Belleville Bulls** (32-31-3) will be in the hunt. In exhibition play Kory Cooper has demonstrated he's ready to take over as the club's number one netminder. However, it's doubtful Richard Park will be back. The defence is a little thin after you get by Marc Dupuis and Sean Brown.

Brian Kilrea is back at the **Ottawa 67's** (22-38-6) helm and if he can get Russian phenom Ser-



The Bulls and Kingston Frontenacs have been bitter long-time OHL rivals.

gei Samsonov in the lineup this team will make some noise. He needs for former first overall pick Alyn McCauley to rebound from a terrible sophomore year and for Jure Kovacevic to fully recover from a serious back injury.

The **Kingston Frontenacs** (40-19-7) have been gutted going into this season, losing the likes of David Ling and Wes Swinson. Even Chad Kilger, their best returning player, could end up sticking with the Anaheim Mighty Ducks. Tim Keyes, the Fronts only netminder with OHL experience, went to Barrie in the expansion draft. Kingston believes 1994 third rounder John Hultberg can do the job in net. Rookie Mike Olievera, a third

rounder with first round skills, has put up big scoring numbers during the pre-season.

Speaking of gutted, the **North Bay Centennials** (35-27-4) championship team of two years ago will be just a fond memory in the Bay this season. Don't take the Bay. Talented netminder Scott Roche isn't going to be able to do it all himself. One veteran returnee (he'll be lonely) is diminutive Lee Jinman, a 100-point man.

CENTRAL DIVISION

The loss of coach Craig Hartsburg and centre Jeff O'Neill shouldn't keep the **Guelph Storm** (47-14-5) from repeating as division champs. Left winger Jamie Wright leads a strong re-

turning cast.

There is light at the end of the tunnel for the **Niagara Falls Thunder** (18-40-8) after two sub-par seasons. All of that losing meant high draft choices and they'll mature this year. One of them is former Sudbury blueliner Jay McKee. And, with Sherry Bassin as GM the Thunder has one of the game's great architects.

Rebuilding the **Sudbury Wolves** (43-17-6) defence will be a major priority for Glen Merkosky. He's lost Rory Fitzpatrick, Jamie Rivers and Mike Wilson, the OHL's big three. Centre Jason Bonsignore needs to really blossom as a scorer and David MacDonald must continue to provide top notch goaltending.

The house cleaning by the **Kitchener Rangers** (18-42-6) last year, getting rid of OHL stars like Wes Swinson, Eric Manlow and Trevor Gallant, is expected to pay off this year with the youngsters who came in return. Goaltender David Belitski was an all star in his rookie year.

In **Barrie** the **Colts** have several advantages over earlier expansion teams, including a generous expansion draft, three over-ages instead of two, high picks in the midget draft and Bert Templeton behind the bench. First pick overall Dan Tkaczuk may lead Barrie to threaten Belleville's record of 24 wins by an expansion team.

It falls on the **Owen Sound Platers** (22-38-6) to finish behind an expansion team. And, with Wayne Primeau and little else this is the team to do it.

WEST DIVISION

At least initially the **Detroit Jr. Whalers** (44-18-4) will have star defenceman Brian Berard in their already solid lineup. Big power forward Sean Haggerty will lead the offence. Fifth-year OHLer Dan Preston, who played four years with the Bulls, will help on the blueline.

Last year former NHLer Mark Hunter helped turn the **Sarnia Sting** (24-47-5) into a playoff contender and that trend will continue this season. Rookie goaltender Patrick Desrocher back-stopped Team Ontario's gold medal win at the world under-17 championships. Aaron Brand had 17 power play goals last year.

The best of the **Windsor Spitfires** (41-22-3), like Ed Jovanovski and Billy Bowler, are gone. Only a shell of the team returns and that will mean a long season for coach Mike Kelly.

Danny Flynn lost his job because the rebuilding **Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds** (17-45-4) decided he was the most convenient fall guy. New coach Joe Paterson won't find things any better at this once proud franchise. Goalie Dan Cloutier and first rounder Joe Thornton (cousin to former Bull Scott) lead a sorry bunch.

The **London Knights** (18-44-4) will lean heavily on first pick Adam Colagiacomo and over-age Corey Isen will help some. It's a very young team.

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