

Law of averages favors Bulls

10 reasons why Belleville will be No. 1

By Paul Svoboda

The Intelligencer

Ah, September. In September in the Ontario Hockey League, everybody's a winner.

Every team is a contender. Every team has a shot at winning its division. Every team is a legitimate Memorial Cup challenger.

Wrong. Once the regular season gets under way it's back to rude reality for OHL coaches, players and fans. For some, the dreams will be fulfilled. For others, the dreams will simply go POOF!

So, while we're languishing in the warm and luxuriant optimism of September, here's 10 reasons why the Belleville Bulls should win the OHL champion-

ship in 1995-96. Of course, we reserve the right to change our opinion in March:

1. Bye-bye clutch-and-grab.

Following the lead of the NHL, OHL commissioner David Branch has ordered a league-wide crack-down on existing rules prohibiting interference, especially in the neutral zone against players not carrying the puck. In other words, the zebras have been told to start calling the stuff they've been ignoring for years. For the Bulls, it's good news. After all, Belleville must assemble a team that can skate in the cavernous Sports Centre so any alterations to the game that can free up their speed-burners is helpful. It could mean more power plays and more goals for the Bulls, especially at home.

2. Memorial Cup memories.

This season, it's the OHL's turn to host the national final. Instead of simply awarding the tournament or asking for submitted bids, the OHL has created an

open competition. The top two teams in each division late in the season will qualify to host the Memorial Cup. Visions of a packed barn in May should provide plenty of extra motivation for Bulls management.

3. The Newfoundland Express.

What does Newfoundland import Daniel Cleary do for an encore? How about screech to a 50-goal performance with a boatload of talent that leaves NHL scouts hoping they can hook him at the 1997 entry draft. If Cleary can top his rookie season, Bulls could ride the Newfoundland Express deep into playoff country.

4. Fill 'em up.

With the QSC renovation project eventually including some new planks for fans to park their butts, the pressure will be on Bulls owner Doc Vaughan to make sure the Bulls are an exciting bunch this season to attract future seasons ticket holders. What better sales pitch than a trip to the finals?

5. The Year of the Bull.

We haven't consulted our Chinese new year's calendar yet, but why not just declare 1996 to be the Year of the Bull anyway?

6. It's Mav's turn.

Of the Big Three longest-serving OHL coaches (along with Brian Kilrea and Bert Templeton), Belleville's Larry Mavety is the lone bench boss not to win an OHL championship. By gosh, it's Mav's turn.

7. Free Park-ing Zone.

We're not saying he's coming back for sure. There remains a strong possibility that Richard Park will stick with the rebuilding Pittsburgh Penguins. If, however, he returns, Park could win both the OHL scoring championship and lead Belleville to post-season glory.

8. Out with the old.

No, they don't have a new logo yet. But the staid old Merrill-Lynch bull that adorns the front of the Belleville jerseys is just about ready for pasture. The swing now is toward cartoon-type

characters. Or, in the Bulls' case, a snorting, stamping animated bull with a temper. That being said, it would be nice for the Bulls to win it all for the old bull.

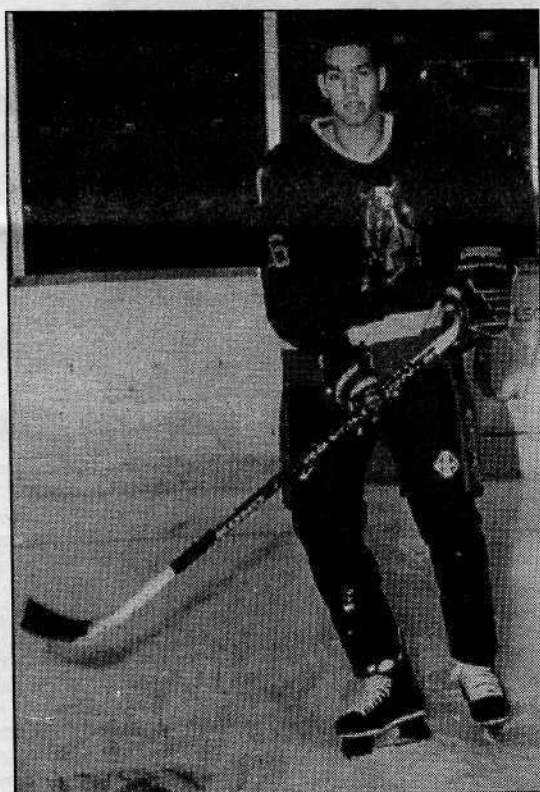
9. Party on, dude.

The winters are mighty long in good old Hastings County and it's a long time between Ground Hog Day and the Waterfront Festival and Folklorama. Plus, the last time Belleville really went wild about a hockey team (the 1958-59 Allan Cup and World Champion McFarlands), longtime Bulls officer Russ Soule had a brushcut.

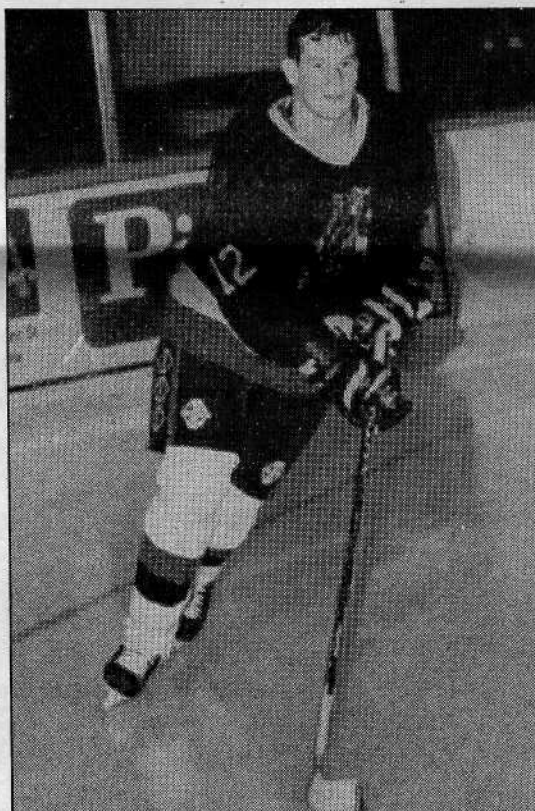
10. The Law of Averages.

Three seasons ago Belleville was eliminated from the playoffs in the first round. Two seasons ago Belleville won the first round, then fell in the second. Last season, Belleville advanced to the OHL Final Four. According to our scientific principles, Belleville wins it all this season.

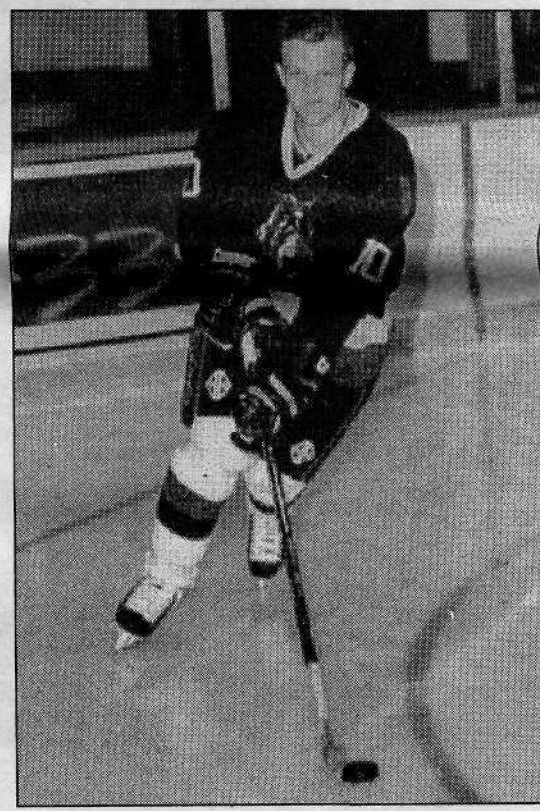
Hey, it's September. Read this again next spring.



JAMIE SOKOLSKY, 2nd year defence, No. 6



STEVE TRACZE, second year right winger, No. 12



ADAM ROBBINS, second year left wing, No. 10

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