

The Acton Free Press

Sports Page

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Second Section

Jr. B clubs start race for top spot



Sabres' Dave Chapman leads team into new season

Eight teams go to the post this weekend, as the race for the '77-78 OHA Central Junior "B" League pennant and six playoff berths opens.

Streetsville Derbys, two time group champions and '76-77 OHA finalists, will try to make it three in a row against the '76-77 regular season pennant winners Oakville Blades, Burlington Cougars, Milton Flyers, Georgetown Gemini, Brampton Chevys, Acton Sabres and Dixie Beehives.

There are four new coaches and four returnees. Rookie mentors include Eric Wilson in Brampton, John "Scotty" Watson in Dixie, Bruce Chapman in Acton and Brian McCarthy in Burlington. Back behind the bench again are Streetsville's Tom Barrett, Milton's Gerry Inglis, Oakville's Eric Smith and Georgetown's Paul Robinson.

The Dixie club, formerly known as "Ventures", was renamed "Beehives" when Howard Pallett, veteran hockey exec took over ownership of the club again. The Brampton Minor Hockey Association has bought the junior club there, although the nickname, Logan's Chevys, remains the same.

This week, sports editors Denis Gibbons of The Independent, Georgetown, John Bottomley of The Acton Free Press and Peter McCusker of The Milton Canadian Champion, combine efforts to present the Dills Publishing newspapers' annual preview of OHA Central Junior "B" teams.

ACTON

The Sabres, who were baptized into Junior B play last season with a record of three wins, two ties and 37 losses, definitely plan to do better this year.

They are helped in their efforts by the return of their two top players from last year, league scoring champion Dave Chapman and goalie Kent Moffatt, one of the best in the loop.

The weak spot on the team will be defence again this year. The only two players returning from last year's defensive unit are Bud Buchanan and Rick Widmot, and the situation has the management looking all around the league for experienced players to help them out. One they expect to sign is Jim Cudney, who played for the Blades two years ago. Mike Major, from Guelph, is also a good looking prospect.

Forwards are looking better this year than last, with Chapman back and Peter Wiklum and the 16-year-old line of Dave McGilloway, Scott Malcolm and Wade Vickery all looking good in the Sabres two exhibition losses.

Both losses came at the hands of Port Colborne, and were considerably closer than last year's 10-0 debacle against the same squad. The improvement has raised hopes in the Sabre camp.

There is a winning attitude among the players this year, as nobody on the team wants to play through a repeat of last year's performance. Partly responsible for the turnaround in attitude is new coach Bruce Chapman who has done a lot of work at building enthusiasm on the squad.

He has also done a lot to clean up the Sabres game. He wants his players on the ice for games instead of in the penalty box, and their play in exhibition has shown that they are keeping their heads better than last year.

Ages on the team range from 15-year-old Kelly MacArthur expected to be a standout, to 20-year-olds Chapman, Doug Elliott and Cudney. Overall the team will be fast and small although there are a few larger players.

They have been training since August, so it will be a team in shape from game one, which will give them an edge in the early going.

DIXIE BEEHIVES

Things appear to be back to normal in "Dixieland". Howard Pallett has his Junior "B" hockey club back and the Junior "B" Beehives really will be a farm club for the Tier 2 Junior "A" squad.

Pallett, one of the most respected junior hockey owners in the province, bought back the Ventures and renamed them the "Beehives", restoring a Junior "B" hockey tradition that has produced NHL stars like Vic Hadfield and Fred Stanfield in the past.

The "Dean of Dixie" is determined to rebuild his Tier 2 Junior "A" Beehives, who have finished in the Provincial League cellar two years in a row, using the Junior "B" club as a training ground for prospects. Bill Buchan, whom Pallett has hired as general manager of both clubs, promises there'll be no repeat of the reverse airlift which saw the Junior "B" Ventures load up with players from the floundering Junior "A" Beehives just before playoff time the past two seasons.

The Junior "A" Beehives have already shown they mean business by winning four straight exhibition games, then upsetting Ron Smith's powerful Guelph Platers right in Guelph Memorial Gardens on the opening night of the regular season. Four ex-Ventures, John Higgins, Rory Carroll, Russ Foster and Bill Shutt are now with the "A" club.

Neither Grant Sloane nor Peter Lennon, who tended goal for the Ventures last season, will be back. Sloane, one of the Central group's best netminders over the last two seasons, has decided to concentrate on first year studies at U of T. Lennon has signed with the Tier 2 Junior "A" Royal York Rangers. The Junior "B" Beehives will also find veterans Robbie May, Guy Mortson and Barry Carroll hard to replace. All three went overseas.

Coach John "Scotty" Watson and manager Bill McMahon are left with only two experienced players and a bushel full of rookies. The Junior "B" Beehives are rebuilding and are not expected to hold on to the second place their predecessors, the Ventures, grabbed last season.

Right winger Ross Belcher is the only Venture returning to the "B" club. The only other player with Junior "B" experience signed, so far, is defenceman Lloyd Moore, who toiled last year for the lowly Acton Sabres. Gord Michaud from Mississauga midgets and Rob Spath from the Dorset Park Bruins are the other rearguards on cards, so far.

Up front, Bob Neiser and Tom Raptapoulous from Mississauga midgets, Dave Poulin and Steve Cruikshank from Mississauga juveniles, Sean Mumelequette from Clarkson and Jeff Black, who played college hockey in Western Canada last year, have been inked to cards.

The Beehive Bs will rely on Gary Davis from North York juveniles and Mississauga midgets' grad Orst Opychek to handle their goaltending chores.

The young Beehives have not looked all that bad in preseason games, dropping a pair of close 6-4 decisions to St. Michael's of the Metro Junior "B" group. But it may take the rookies a while to warm up to Junior "B" competition and Beehives will likely be battling to grab a playoff spot, rather than the pennant, come February.

GEORGETOWN GEMINI

Georgetown Gemini surprised all the experts by finishing third with a respectable 19-14-3 record in their first season of Junior "B" competition two years ago, but last year Gems slumped both on the ice and at the box office, finishing fifth with a sub .500 record and dropping an average of 200 fans per game.

Gems are hoping to climb back up into the first division using a roster divided almost equally between experienced Junior "B" players and 17 year olds, fresh out of midget. The club is trying to forget the internal spats which plagued them last season and start the '77-78 season with a positive outlook. Bob Thompson, who formerly worked successfully with minor hockey in Georgetown, has taken over as club president. Paul Robinson and Bob Tost are back for their third terms as coach and manager, respectively.

A major reason for Gemini optimism is the return of sharpshooter Doug Barnes, whose 39 goals and 39 assists last year, left him just a point shy of Acton's Dave Chapman for the individual scoring championship. Barnes' play is hot and cold, but when he's in high gear, he's the best player in the league.

Also returning are Terry "Tex" Turner, a hard-nosed little centre who tallied 8 goals and 26 assists in the regular season and was Gems' best post-season player, centre Mike Richmond, a 17 goal scorer in his rookie season, winger Paul Martin, who fired 9 goals and assisted on 22 as a rookie, and towering defenceman Joe South, a 1976 draft choice of the Major Junior "A" Kitchener Rangers. Paul Allison another skyscraper who can play both forward and defence has signed as has Marty Kendall, who joined the club after Christmas last year. Allison scored 7 goals after moving up from Georgetown juveniles in mid-season.

Four players are fighting it out for the number 1 goaltending job left vacant by the graduation of reliable Rick Tomkinson. They include Tomkinson's backup man Brad Miller, Ken Eckroth, who played with the Gems two years ago and with Acton Sabres last season, juvenile Glenn Tost and Bill Humphries, a graduate of Georgetown midgets.

Manager Bob Tost has signed three rookies, defenceman Bob McCandless and wingers Tim Turner (Terry's younger brother) and Bob Allison. All three played last season with

Georgetown midgets. Locals Andy Broadbent, Terry Crawford, Blake Emmerson and Frank Routheut are also trying out, along with Mississauga youngsters, Tony Gininni, Chris Chapman, Frank Pointeck and Doug Reeves and Bill Barber, a graduate of the Bolton midget club.

Gems' success will depend to a large degree on what defenceman Bill Allison and winger Dale Mieczanec, a pair of proven Junior "B" players, decide to do. Both have attended training camp sessions, after sitting out last season while they got their feet wet in university studies.

Gems lost eight players to overage, including Tomkinson, defenceman Larry Peterson, who set the league on fire with 52 goals in two seasons of play, 17 goal sniper Charlie Knoepfl, Ian Syme, a 16 goal marksman, Tom Fendley, Bill Kirby, Bruce Bailey and Bill McGilloway, Kevin Reeks and Mike Osborne will concentrate on studies and centre Chris Milne was still with the Tier 2 Junior "A" Guelph Platers at press time.

In exhibition play, Gems downed Thornhill 8-6, but lost 6-4 to Caledonia.

STREETSVILLE DERBYS

If they're able to ice enough players for every game, Streetsville Derbys look like a cinch to win their third straight group championship and perhaps the OHA crown that just eluded them last season when they lost to Stratford in the provincial finals.

Tom Barrett's Derbys have never had a problem scoring goals, but they haven't always been able to convince OHA referees that their roughhouse style of play is in the best interest of hockey. Barrett says hockey is a rough game, but opponents have charged Streetsville with intimidation.

Derbys must open the regular season against Georgetown, Friday night, with 11 players out of the lineup. All picked up suspensions in preseason games, as the Derbys lost twice to Hamilton, but beat Waterloo and Toronto Red Wings. Manager Russ Evans says he'll fill out his opening game roster with midgets and juveniles.

Evans feels the '77-78 Derbys will be stronger than the past two group champions, in spite of the loss of several standouts. Jim Gibson the club's MVP, will play at Cornell University, defenceman Danny Sulton has gone to Michigan State, Gord Stanfield is overage, Steve Dickson is headed for St. Mary's U. in Halifax and young Steve Wicklum has signed with the Major Junior "A" Niagara Falls Flyers. Both regular goalies are also gone. Dave Quennell will attend Brock University and Bill Drewery has quit.

Derbys have signed experienced forwards Jim Baker and Bill Brodie, who came to the club in the middle of last season from the Tier 2 Junior "A" Dixie Beehives, and two rookies from North Bay, goalie Rick Laferrriere and defenceman Moe Mantha. Laferrriere played 15 games for the Tier 2 Junior "A" North Bay Trappers as a juvenile last season. Mantha is the son of the ex-pro of the same name.

Reliable returnees, George Chandler, Randy Strong, Gary Venner, Steve Blair, Leo Brideau, Scott Snarr, Reb Brooks, Mike Prestidge and Jim Boyington should give opposition goalies plenty of trouble, if they sign. Boyington has Major Junior "A" experience with Sault Ste. Marie. Also back in camp is rearguard Len Bryant, who left the club to play in the Toronto Marlies' chain last year.

Paul Bates, who played last year with the Tier 2 Junior "A" Toronto Nationals, is trying to grab a regular spot in the Derby Lineup, but the best newcomer in Streetsville this winter could be frontliner Graham Hall. Hall, a graduate of Mississauga midgets, came to the Derbys recently when Barrett traded utility forward Chris Costello, a proven Junior "B" hockey player.

Hall will miss the first six weeks of the schedule with torn knee ligaments, but Barrett has already paid the youngster a compliment by calling him "a young Gibson", in reference to his club's MVP last year. Dixie's Howard Pallett agrees that Hall is a topnotch prospect.

Barrett says Derbys are having their best camp ever in his eight years as coach. He's hinted that there could be some surprise cuts.

Attacking forwards will be pleased to know that Derbys' giant 6'5" 220 lb. defenceman, Gary Purden, is overage.

OAKVILLE BLADES

It was supposed to be a rebuilding year for the Oakville Blades last year but they finished the season in first place. This year, once again, they're supposed to have a raft of young inexperienced rookies with seven returning players.

Team manager Murray Walker said he has a young team with a lot of spirit. "The boys are hustling, eager and have the ability to learn. That's all you can ask for," Walker said. He will make no predictions.

In pre-season exhibitions Oakville dumped Dundas 2-0 and 12-2 but fell to Hespeler Shamrocks 7-5 and 8-5. Blades open their regular season Sunday when they travel to Milton to meet the Flyers. It was Milton who upset the Blades in the playoffs last year.

Returning for Blades are Doug Taylor, Bruce Vaughan, Eric Medland, Willie McFarlane, Todd Inouye, Brian Marvel and Shane Pavette.

Sabres

Defence improves

Sabres' defence, the biggest question mark on the team, showed a big improvement in last Friday's exhibition loss at Port Colborne as the addition of Jim Cudmore, formerly of the Oakville Blades, and Mike Major of Guelph were both impressive in helping out regulars Rick Widmot and Bud Buchanan.

Final score of the game was 7-4 for Team Port Colborne, and coach Bruce Chapman gave the defence credit for keeping it close. "They held us in the game," he said.

Keeping cool After the game Chapman remarked "I'm very pleased. The boys are doing exactly what I want them to." He is trying to cut down the penalty minutes for the team and teach players how to keep their cool on the ice.

"This is something completely new for Acton," he said. Penalty minutes for the two teams were even, each team collecting 23. A five

minute major in the first period hurt the Sabres chances.

As a measure of how well Chapman is doing at leveling heads, Rob Millican was jumped in the hallway between the second and third periods, and the team kept its composure for the third frame. Millican had boarded a Port Colborne player just as the second period ended, which caused the attack.

Walker scores Sabres opened the scoring when Brian Walker, from Mississauga, took a Dave Chapman pass right in front of the net for a goal. Second Sabres' goal went to Doug Elliott, still in the first period. Assists went to Walker and Kelly MacArthur.

Walker collected his second goal in the final frame as Chapman again hit him with a pass. Jim Cudmore, the defenceman from Oakville, got in for an assist on this point. Final Acton marker came on an unassisted effort

from Major.

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