



'Late-bloomer' Heelis shines in overage year with Attack

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

The city of Owen Sound is viewed as a Siberia of sorts to some Ontario Hockey Leaguers, but Georgetown's Liam Heelis is thrilled about his overage junior campaign in the Scenic City.

The 20-year-old forward has 17 goals and 29 assists in 55 games for the Attack, which has been a revelation this year at the top of the OHL West Conference standings with a 37-15-3 record, five points ahead of second-place Saginaw with 13 games left in the regular season.

Not once since the Guelph Platers' franchise moved to the Bruce Peninsula for the 1989-90 season has Owen Sound finished first in its division amongst the likes of Kitchener, London and Guelph, but Heelis feels this year's squad has a legitimate shot at making it to the Memorial Cup at the Hershey Centre in Mississauga in May.

"I couldn't have asked for anything better for my last year of junior, to be on a first-place team in a hockey town," said the 6-foot-1, 190-pound Heelis, who had 30 goals over three seasons with the Peterborough Petes before being acquired by the Attack last summer.

"It's a pretty tight barn up there and the fans are wild. We have a hard-working team

and everyone's on board. After three years in Peterborough, it was time for a fresh start and a new opportunity for me and it's worked out great."

Heelis has become a fan favourite in Owen Sound with his energetic, hard-hitting style of play and he's particularly proud of his plus/minus total of +29, 15th best in the league.

"That's what I sold my play on, being a strong defensive player who can contribute offensively."

He also made TSN's nightly Honour Roll for one of the three goals he scored in a Jan. 20 win in Barrie over the Colts, his first OHL hat trick.

Dale DeGray, the Attack's general manager, said that Heelis doesn't need a letter on his jersey to be an important leader on the club and he's been mildly surprised by the former Mississauga Jr. A Charger's offensive output, calling him a late-bloomer.

"Right from the start, he's been outstanding in all facets of the game," said DeGray.

"He's shown everyone in Owen Sound a work ethic that's second to none and he's shown

an offensive skill set that a lot of people didn't think he had. Liam pays attention to the little details in his own end and takes pride in that. It's refreshing to see someone come around as a player the way he has done it."

At a recent game in Brampton, with the score tied at one in the second period, Heelis flattened Battalion forward Philip Lane with a clean open-ice bodycheck, then soundly defeated Cameron Wind in a fight after the latter came to the defence of his teammate.

The Attack scored shortly after en route to a 4-1 victory and although Heelis went pointless, his hit seemed to change the course of the game.

He said he's looking at some options to play somewhere next season, whether at a Canadian university or professionally, but the Attack's focus now is to make its first-ever trip to the Memorial Cup.

"Providing that Mississauga-St. Mike's makes it through in their conference, there's a great opportunity for us to reach our goal (by winning three rounds instead of four)," he added.

"I've been talking with some schools for next season and we'll wait to see what happens with any pro interest. My main goal is to get a pro contract and if that doesn't work out, then school is definitely for me."



LIAM HEELIS

Georgetown native Liam Heelis has been a force at both ends of the rink for the Owen Sound Attack, which is enjoying its best-ever regular season in 20 years as an Ontario Hockey League franchise. He has 46 points while playing in all 55 games for the first-place Attack this season, his last as a junior. However, his play in 2010-11 will likely mean that Heelis will continue his career next year either at the professional or Canadian university level.

Photo by Bryon Johnson

OJHL North/West Conference

- Best-of-7 quarterfinal**
- Game 1**
Saturday, Feb. 19
@ Oakville, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 2**
Wednesday, Feb. 23
@ Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 3**
Friday, Feb. 25
@ Oakville, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 4**
Saturday, Feb. 26
@ Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 5 (if necessary)**
Tuesday, March 1
@ Oakville, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 6 (if necessary)**
Wednesday, March 2
@ Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 7 (if necessary)**
Friday, March 4
@ Oakville, 7:30 p.m.

Raiders get charged up for playoffs

Trying to avoid elimination at the hands of the Oakville Blades for a fourth straight season, the Georgetown Raiders will get another shot at their Halton rivals beginning Saturday night.

Game one of the Ontario Jr. Hockey League's quarter-final series is set for the Six-

teen Mile Creek Recreation Complex starting at 7:30 p.m., pitting the OJHL North-West Conference's third-place Blades against number six Georgetown.

Game two will be at the Alcott Arena next Wednesday (Feb. 23).

The Raiders finished the

regular season with a 5-2 win over the visiting Mississauga Chargers Saturday night.

Mike Charbonneau (2), Kyle Dube, Evan Rodrigues and Scott Wilson tallied for the Raiders, who finished the 2010-11 campaign with a 32-15-3 record. Michael Stiliadis earned the win in goal.

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