

# RAIDER PLAYOFF PREVIEW

## Raiders looking to break Blades' hex

For a league that seemingly changes its playoff format every year, Halton junior hockey fans can still count on a common denominator.

Oakville vs. Georgetown.

For the fourth year in succession, the Blades will take on the Raiders in the post-season, albeit it's not happened this early in the tournament.

Whatever the stage, the Raiders would finally like to witness a happy ending from their bench after bowing out to the big bad Blades the past three years.

Game one of the best-of-7 Ontario Jr. Hockey League series was played Saturday in Oakville at the sparkling new

Sixteen Mile Creek Sports Complex (prior to the publication of this section), with game two set for Georgetown's Alcott Arena Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

Game three will be contested Friday in Oakville and game four is back in Georgetown Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

It would appear the Blades are the favourites to advance again after a slow start to the season, in which they won just nine of their first 18 games and struggled to generate offence.

But teams put together by Blades' GM Carlo Coccimiglio have been built with the playoffs in mind, proven by their two trips to the Royal Bank Cup national championship tournament in the last three seasons.

Third-place Oakville finished the 2010-11 campaign by winning 27 of their final 32 starts, while the sixth-place Raiders slipped from being one of Canada's top-10 rated clubs in the fall to having to stomach losses to weak OJHL opponents such as Milton and Mississauga.

Still, the Raiders have a talented, veteran squad with eight players getting 20 goals or more.

In his first season in the league as Georgetown's coach and general manager after several years as an associate coach with the Ontario Hockey League's Sarnia Sting, former Toronto Maple Leaf draft pick Greg Walters made several lineup changes through the year and it will be interesting to see if the team can come together at the right time.

Just two defenders who started the season with the Raiders are still here, and 17-



**Eamonn Maher**



Justin Basso (10) of the Georgetown Raiders tracks down Oakville's Josh Ranalli during an Ontario Jr. Hockey League contest Feb. 4 at the Sixteen Mile Creek Sports Complex. The Blades won this game 5-3 on a late clinching goal and took the season series 4-2. Game two of their OJHL quarterfinal playoff series will be played at the Alcott Arena in Georgetown Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Photo by Eamonn Maher

year-old goaltender Michael Nishi will get the opportunity to make a case for being in the OHL Windsor Spitfires' future plans.

Oakville, meanwhile, is backstopped by 21-year-old Daniel Savelli, whose presence is fortified by the usual collection of blue-line redwoods. Up front, Marietta, Ga. native Kyle Lysaght led the Blades with 35 goals this year and former Raider Mark McGowan netted 25.

Adding some heat to the Trafalgar Rd. rivalry were the summertime defections of ex-Georgetown vice president Joe Laise and Raider assistant coach Mike Manuel of Acton

over to the Oakvillains' camp. No fewer than six Raiders, including captain Scott Wilson, reside in Oakville.

The Blades won all three meetings in the smaller Georgetown rink during the regular season thanks to their stifling team defence after grabbing the lead, while the Olympic-size surface at Sixteen Mile may actually favour the Raiders with the likes of returning forwards Evan Rodrigues, Wilson, Duston Hebebrand and 43-goal-man Justin Basso able to shake loose.

The Raiders won the first two matchups in Oakville and easily could have taken

the third on Feb. 4 if not for some poor finishing around the net, but as the season progressed the Blades adapted well under former Burlington Cougar coach Mark Jooris to the new dimensions, not having lost there since Nov. 26.

Walters jokingly said he's scouted and studied the Blades so much that he knows more about them than his own group.

There's no secret, then, that his Raiders will have to withstand the same physical challenge presented by the Blades in recent playoff clashes in order to break the current frustrating stranglehold of their Halton rivals.

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