

RAIDERS PLAYOFF PREVIEW

Thursday, March 3, 2016

The Independent & Free Press Special pullout section

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Raiders ready for post-season push

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It's been said many times that good junior hockey programs never rebuild, they just reload.

And for many years, that's been the case with the Ontario Junior Hockey League's Georgetown Raiders.

But there was a real sense of a large void left after the way the Raiders exited last year's playoffs, with a team that was built to contend for a league championship.

They were led by one of the top Tier II Jr. A players in the country, a scoring machine named Steve Hladin, who guided the veteran-laden squad to a regular-season South/West Conference title, 11 points better than the second-place Toronto Patriots.

Yet Georgetown narrowly got past the eighth-place Buffalo Jr. Sabres in the opening round and was admittedly outskated by the Toronto Jr. Canadiens in a shocking second-round sweep.

Raider head coach & general manager Greg Walters had just six returnees and far-fewer-than-usual 20-year-olds, with three, to work with heading into 2015-16, but thanks to some shrewd recruiting during the off-season, the team has surprised many by earning its

second straight conference crown. The Raiders have won 18 of their last 21 games entering their best-of-7 first-round matchup with the Orangeville Flyers and boast a dozen players who've scored at least nine goals.

It's gone beyond everyone's expectations I think, said Brendan Jacome, one of the trio of graduating players who'll attend the University of Ottawa in September.



JACK
JACOME



BRENDAN
JACOME

We had a strong team last year and kind of choked in the playoffs. Now we're a more-balanced team and faster. There just seems to be more energy with this group and everything's been going well.

Two local natives, Josh Dickinson and Daniel Hardie, have been a big part of the resurgence, potting 43 goals between them, and the acquisition of 20-year-old netminder Andrew Masters, whom Walters cut here as a 17-year-old, has turned out to be a godsend.

The Jacome brothers, sensational rookie Jack and 20-year-old Brendan, are one-two in team

scoring and the defence is led by Matt Cairns, a captain in the making at age 17. Walters, in his sixth year in Georgetown, confided that it's the most satisfying season he's had to date, because of the improvements shown by so many of his charges.

It's amazing how these kids have just gelled. We didn't really have expectations coming into this season with so many new players, so it's been awesome, he said.

They hold themselves to a very high standard within the dressing room and we have great leadership. Our goaltending's been unbelievable all year and we're a tough team to play against.

And while there was no secret that Hladin would be the primary target of opposition checkers last season, the Raiders' offence has been dispersed through the lineup. Other teams may try to key on the Jacomes, but Walters is notorious for jumbling up his line combinations in the post-season.

Brendan's been here four years and he's met all of our expectations, Walters added. He holds his teammates accountable and with 32 goals this year he's having a breakout season, but at the same time he's one of the top defensive players in our league.



Georgetown Raiders forward Daniel Hardie celebrates a big goal with teammates during an Ontario Junior Hockey League regular-season contest at the Alcott Arena. The 17-year-old rookie, one of three Georgetown residents on the team, notched 20 goals and averaged more than a point a game with the Raiders this season. Hardie is a graduate of the Halton Hurricanes minor hockey program. Photo by Brian Watts/OJHL Images

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