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Raiders left to wonder: What happened?

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

Another nightmarish first period came at the worst possible time for the Georgetown Raiders as they were bounced from the Ontario Junior Hockey League playoffs Monday night by the host St. Michael's Buzzers after a 6-2 loss.

The Raiders were facing their biggest game of the season and needed something special to stage a comeback in the series, but instead, St. Mike's, the OJHL South West Conference's second seed, eliminated third-place Georgetown 4-1 in their best-of-7 semifinal matchup.

In the first four games of the series, the Raiders had to pull their starting netminder following soft goals allowed and it happened again Monday, even though Gabe Grunwald was screened on the first two Buzzer tallies.

He was replaced by Keegan Wilson after the third Buzzer goal and it didn't take long for the home side to grab a 4-0 lead off a two-on-one break just 13 minutes into the first period.

Although the Raiders made it interesting with goals by Tyler MacPherson and Nick Perruccio in the middle frame, St. Michael's quelled the Raider rally with two insurance markers within the last five minutes of regulation. Matt Buckles led his squad with a hat trick.

"It's no secret, we didn't get the goaltending we needed," said Raiders' head coach and general manager Greg Walters after Monday's defeat.

"Our power play wasn't good either and when those two things aren't going, it's tough to win against good hockey teams. (Wilson and Grunwald) are both great kids and they just struggled at the end. It wasn't for a lack of compete or being unprepared, but for whatever reason, they weren't achieving well enough. The same can be said for our power play in the last two games."

The Buzzers now move on to face



Georgetown Raiders' goalie Gabe Grunwald and defenceman Liam Clare wait out the final seconds of their 6-2 loss to the host St. Michael's Buzzers Monday night in Toronto. The Raiders were eliminated from the playoffs with the loss, dropping their OJHL South West Conference semifinal series four games to one. *Photo by Eamonn Maher*

the winner of the other South West semifinal between the first-place Buffalo Jr. Sabres and the North York Rangers. The fourth-place Rangers led the series 3-1 heading into game five Wednesday evening in Buffalo.

Under the new ownership of Burlington's Bill & Cindy Court this season, the Raiders brought back only three players from the team that lost in the OJHL semifinals to Stouffville on home ice in the seventh and decid-

ing game.

Walters complemented a young core of recruits by adding some veteran talent before the Christmas break, but finishing the regular season just one point behind the division-winning Buffalo Jr. Sabres meant a more difficult path in the post-season for Georgetown, which included a tough six-game opening-round triumph over the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots.

The early December trade that sent talented young netminder Dan-

iel Mannella to Stouffville in exchange for 20-year-old forwards Alex Botten and Jacob Bauchman, along with veteran goalie Knick Dawe, sent shockwaves through the league.

But Dawe ended up signing with

the OHL's Sarnia Sting, opening the door for Wilson, another netminder with major junior experience, to carry the load. The 19-year-old Grunwald had also proven to be a capable backup through the year, posting a 13-6-1-1 mark.

"After the trade, we took off and had a great stretch, but there was an overtime point we lost with 30 seconds left in Buffalo and another loss to the Jr. Canadiens that really hurt us," lamented the 42-year-old Walters, who's been in charge of the Raiders for three seasons.

"I felt we had the right people in place and we just weren't able to put it all together in the second round against a very good team. I feel badly for the 20-year-olds playing their last game, but a lot of them are moving on to bigger and better things."

As for himself and assistant coaches Terry Richardson and Andrew Martin, Walters said that they've been offered contract extensions by the Courts and all that needs to be worked out is the length of the deals. Bill Court has politely declined interview requests from *The Independent & Free Press*, saying he prefers to operate behind the scenes.

"We want to come back and (the Courts) have indicated to us that they'd like us to return, so it all looks positive," Walters added.

'It's no secret, we didn't get the goaltending we needed.'

—Coach Greg Walters

Acton skaters strike gold

Acton Skating Club members Linsy Eldridge and Ethan Rutherford earned gold medals for their performance in the preliminary pairs category at the recent March Mania competition in Innisfil to finish off their competitive season. Nine-year-old Eldridge, an Acton resident, and Georgetown's Rutherford, 10, are coached by Vicki Newman and Brian Worfolk.



Submitted photo