

BULLDOGS PLAYOFF PREVIEW

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Bulldogs face Gaels for 7th time in past 8 years

By **EAMONN MAHER**
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Regular-season success didn't translate into playoff prowess for the Halton Hills Bulldogs the last couple of years, so they've decided to take a different route in 2014, their 20th anniversary.

Despite posting 17-2-1 records in 2012 and 2013 during the regular schedule, the Bulldogs were eliminated in the second round both times, ending a run of five consecutive years in which they'd advanced to the Ontario Jr. B Lacrosse League East Conference final or better, winning the Canadian title in 2010.

ald requires surgery on a hip problem and won't be back, while LeBlanc's return is uncertain.

"We've faced a lot of adversity this year and it's been nice to see some of our kids keep fighting through it, not make excuses and keep the team goals in mind," said McCauley. "It's tough not to have an experienced guy like Mikey, but our leadership group knows what it's going to take and we move on."

Fortunately, the Bulldogs have been able to develop prospects from the Halton Hills minor system and they'll need to contribute if the team expects to get back to hanging more banners in the Alcott Arena.

"I think we've got a great shot at it because we're starting to gel as a team at the right time," said Highfield, who recently landed a scholarship to attend the University of Massachusetts Lowell to study business and play for the very first Riverhawks' varsity field lacrosse team when it enters the Eastern College Athletic Conference for the 2015-16 season.

"We've got a few vets and a lot of guys who grew up together playing big games in minor. And we've always got some great older guys like Seth (Laidlaw) who just add to our depth. It's a good group."

For a team that is supposed to be in rebuild mode, the Green Gaels finished tops in the East Conference with a 17-3 record. The teams split the season series 1-1, with each winning on their home floor by a 10-8 result. This year's meeting will also serve as a rubber match in the overall playoff history of the two clubs as it's currently all square at 3-3.

NOTES: The 6-foot-2, 195-pound Highfield was the number one overall pick in last year's Ontario Lacrosse Association Jr. A draft by the Mississauga Tomahawks and after the team went 1-19, he decided to return to his hometown to play Jr. B.

The Bulldogs' leader in assists this year with 43, Highfield was one of two Canadians recruited by UMass-Lowell.

"It'll be interesting to start a team from scratch and see how it develops," he said. "I don't know how well we're going to do in our first year, but it'll be fun to start off that sort of legacy at the school."



Rookie Adam Dobis of the Halton Hills Jr. B Bulldogs sprints away from Carter Badour of the Gloucester Griffins during game three of their Ontario Jr. B Lacrosse League playoff series last weekend in Georgetown. The Bulldogs swept the series 3-0 and now face the first-place Green Gaels in round two.
 Photo by Eamonn Maher



OLA Jr. B East Conference

Best-of-5 semifinal series

Game 1

Saturday, July 12 @ Bowmanville, 7 p.m.

Game 2

Sunday, July 13 @ Georgetown, 7 p.m.

Game 3

Thursday, July 17 @ Bowmanville, 8 p.m.

x-Game 4

Friday, July 18 @ Georgetown, 8 p.m.

x-Game 5

Sunday, July 20 @ Bowmanville, 2 p.m.

x-if necessary

This year's edition of the 'Dogs was short-staffed to start this campaign, scuffling out to a 3-3 start before finishing up fourth in their conference with a 16-4 mark.

Without the anticipated offence of 21-year-old forwards Mike MacDonald, Tyler LeBlanc and Seth Laidlaw, who were out with injury for much of the season, head coach Blaine McCauley leaned on a couple of 18-year-olds to lead the offence in Adam Charalambides and Cory Highfield, along with the White brothers from Guelph, Owen and Lewis, who were picked up in a trade.

Laidlaw is back in the fold and had 20 points in a three-game series sweep over the Gloucester Griffins in the OJBL's opening round of playoffs, but MacDon-

HHMLA developing elite talent

Several graduates of the Halton Hills Minor Lacrosse Association and the Georgetown-based Jr. B Bulldogs have either moved on to succeed at the Jr. A ranks, the U.S. collegiate level and some have even found a job in the National Lacrosse League over the past two decades. Following are some of the recent players who have been selected in the Ontario Lacrosse Association's annual Jr. A draft:

2014

Drayden Patey, goaltender, 4th overall by Peterborough Lakers. The 17-year-old Bulldogs' rookie has been a more-than-reliable backup with a 5-1 record and owns an impressive resume, including two Canadian championships as the starting netminder for Team Ontario.

2013

Cory Highfield, forward, 1st overall by Mississauga Tomahawks. Highfield, now 18, played for the Tommies last year in hopes of turning moribund franchise around and had nine goals and 19 assists in 17 games.

2012

Connor Brown, fourth overall by Mississauga Tomahawks. Eighteen-year-old racked up 101 goals in two seasons with Halton Hills Jr. Bs, including a franchise-record 64 in 2013. Currently leads Orangeville Jr. A Northmen with 33 goals and 47 assists in 19 games.

2011

Jamie Batten, 9th overall, Burlington Chiefs. The 20-year-old from Caledon has been a solid performer for the Bulldogs over the past four seasons.

2010

Mike MacDonald, 3rd overall, Whitby Warriors. After winning the Founders Cup Jr. B title with his hometown club in his rookie campaign, the Princeton University star scored several key goals for Whitby in its 2013 Minto Cup triumph.

A couple of first-round Jr. A picks from other centres that year, Miles Cox and Tyler LeBlanc, have ended up in Georgetown and second-rounder Jayson Crawford is Halton Hills's top defender.