

RAIDERS PLAYOFF PREVIEW

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Raiders feel they've got pieces for extended playoff push

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The arrival of the Ontario Junior Hockey League's post-season would appear to have a bit more of a shine for the two local residents playing for the Georgetown Raiders.

And after dropping the first two games of the their best-of-7 opening-round series to the eighth-place Buffalo Jr. Sabres, a sense of urgency has also taken hold for rookie forward Josh Dickinson and veteran defenceman Liam Clare as the conference-champion Raiders took games three and four to draw even in the hard-fought matchup.

Slotted in the 17th spot in the final Canadian Junior Hockey League rankings of the regular season, Georgetown is expected to make another long playoff run this spring after bowing out to the eventual OJHL-champion Toronto Patriots in last year's South/West conference final.

With a deep roster headed up by OJHL scoring champion Steve Hladin, anything short of a trip to the league final would be considered a disappointment for an organization that has put significant time and resources into building a champion.

It's also the decade anniversary of the Raiders' run to a Dudley Hewitt Cup title and the Royal Bank Cup in 2005 in Weyburn, Sask., but there's a lot of real estate to cover before this year's national championship in Portage la Prairie, Man. in May and the Jr. Sabres showed early in the series that nothing is a given.

"Playoffs are a whole new season and you can tell just in our practices, everything is ramped up. The passes are sharper, the guys are more intense," said the 17-year-old Dickinson, a late-round draft pick of the Sudbury Wolves who had eight goals and 15 assists during the regular season but has been held pointless through the first four games in the Buffalo series.

"Playing in my hometown has been really good. I was in the stands watching the Raiders in the playoffs last year and it's been great having family and friends coming to the games. (But) Coach (Greg Walters) has given us an opportunity and we're working for it. It's there for us and we've just got to take it."

The 5-foot-11, 170-pound Dickinson got an opportunity up close last spring to see what a lengthy playoff drive feels like by watching old-

er brother Jason, a first-round draft pick of the NHL's Dallas Stars, make big contributions to the Guelph Storm in going to the Memorial Cup.

Josh, a Grade 12 Christ the King Secondary School student, has developed into a strong two-way player, much like his brother, and in the late stages of the season has shown a physical edge to his play.

"Josh is our most-improved player," said head coach & GM Greg Walters.

"You see a lot of kids come out of midget hockey and they don't know how to play away from the puck, but Josh has been exceptional for us down the stretch. He's a big kid and a great person first off who works very hard and he's got a great future in the game."

Dickinson is unsure of what lies ahead next year, not knowing if he'll get another shot with a last-place Sudbury team that's won just 10 of 60 games so far.

"I haven't really thought about next year at this point because we're in the playoffs," the Halton AAA Hurricanes' grad added.

"If the OHL works out, great, but the NCAA would be a good option too. Staying back here in Georgetown for another year would be good too."

For the 19-year-old Clare, it's the third and final year of his tenure with the Raiders before moving on with Hladin to attend Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Ct. on a scholarship.

At 6 feet and 170 pounds, the GDHS grad plays in all situations for the Raiders and was second in scoring amongst the team's blueliners with four goals and 25 assists in the regular season, followed up by three assists in the first four games of the series with the Jr. Sabres.

The Raiders had little to play for after clinching the conference title in January and lost four of their last six starts on the schedule before getting a wakeup call against Buffalo.

"We've always had the mentality to be ready for this time of year, that the regular season and finishing in first place don't mean anything now," said the aspiring business student.

"I remember being here (before joining the Raiders) a couple of years ago in the conference finals (against Stouffville) and the arena was packed. Hopefully the more we win and the farther we go, more fans will come out, like in the glory days of the Dudley Hewitt Cup and all those good Raider teams."



Georgetown Raiders' forward Josh Dickinson has been dependable in his own zone and showing signs of offensive flash during his rookie season with the Georgetown Jr. A Raiders. The second-youngest player on the team can always count on big brother Jason, captain of the Ontario Hockey League's Guelph Storm, if he needs some advice. Photo by Shawn Muir/OJHL Images

Jr. Sabres get early series jump, but Raiders rebound to tie it up

With their top gunners held off the scoresheet, the Georgetown Raiders received some secondary support on offence to defeat the Jr. Sabres in Buffalo Monday night and put their first-round playoff matchup all square at two wins apiece.

Game 5 of the best-of-7 Ontario Junior Hockey League South-West Conference quarterfinal matchup was played Wednesday evening at the Alcott Arena.

For updates on the Raiders throughout the playoffs, visit www.theifp.ca

Richard Court, Kyle Allan, Scott Em-

erson and Brendan Jacome tallied for first-place Georgetown as league-leading scorer Steve Hladin and linemates Anthony Marra and John Adams were held pointless.

Rookie netminder Jack LaFontaine won his second straight post-season game, making 30 stops for the Raiders, who had 31 shots on the Buffalo goal.

Game 6 of the series will be played Friday night at the new Harbor Centre in Buffalo and if a seventh-and-deciding contest is required, it would be played in Georgetown Saturday at 7:30 p.m.