

RAIDERS PLAYOFF PREVIEW

Georgetown's terrific net tandem ready for extended run

By Eamonn Maher
emaher@theifp.ca

Depending on how you look at it, the Georgetown Raiders either have a wealth of talent between the pipes heading into the Ontario Junior Hockey League's post-season, or not enough playing time to keep two No. 1-calibre goaltenders happy.

Winning, of course, fixes most problems, and Raiders' head coach and general manager Greg Walters proved last year that alternating the net duties between vets Josh Astorino and Nick Latinovich could be successful as the club captured its first-ever Buckland Cup league title.

As the OJHL playoffs get underway in Georgetown Thursday night at the Alcott Arena, the West Division-champion Raiders appear to again have netminding exhibits 1 and 1A against the South/West Conference's seventh-seeded St. Michael's Buzzers in the best-of-7 series, with accomplished veteran Troy Timpano and rising star Nathan Torchia in the fold.

Pickering native Timpano, 20, was merely the starting keeper in last spring's Memorial Cup final for the Erie Otters in a 4-3 loss to the host Windsor Spitfires, while 17-year-old Waterloo resident Torchia earned the OJHL Goaltender-of-the-Month award for January with a 7-0-0 record.

Each has taken different trajectories to arrive in Georgetown — with Timpano released by the



Georgetown Raider goalies Troy Timpano (35) and Nathan Torchia (1) discuss strategy prior to the overtime period in a recent game against the South/West Conference-champion Toronto Patriots at the Alcott Arena. The Raiders begin their first-round best-of-7 playoff series against St. Michael's Thursday night on home ice.

Ryan McCullough/OJHL Images photo

rebuilding Otters in early January, while Torchia was picked up from struggling Stouffville on Dec. 1 — but both say they're on board with the platoon system.

"The Memorial Cup was fun. The RBC (Royal Bank Cup) is next," remarked Timpano about the long road to the national Jr. A champi-

onship tournament, to be held in Chilliwack, B.C. in mid-May.

"Whoever has the hot hand should be in there. It's all about winning at the end of the day, so whatever it takes. (Nathan) brings it every game and for me being an older guy, to see that you owe the kid a lot of respect. It's been fun to

share the net with him."

During his eight years in charge of the Raiders, Walters has often brought in affiliate players during the playoffs to replace underperforming regulars and hasn't hesitated to switch netminders mid-series with the intent on swinging momentum.

"It helps a lot having Troy there," said Torchia, a fourth-round pick of the OHL's Oshawa Generals in 2016.

"It's great to have someone to look up to and see the work he puts in and carries himself. That's been huge for me. (Since-traded Mario) Cavaliere was amazing too. When you see how they prepare before games, that's what you want to strive for."

Torchia also has some goaltending pedigree through father Mike, who spent four years with the Kitchener Rangers and six games with the Dallas Stars before embarking on a lengthy minor-league career.

"Making (Oshawa) next year is the goal," he said. "I tried this year and just gotta keep working at it so I make the team next year."

Last time the Raiders faced St. Mike's in the playoffs, a peewee-sized 15-year-old named Mitch Marnier debuted in a stacked Buzzers' lineup that went on to capture the 2012-13 OJHL Buckland Cup title, knocking Georgetown out in the second round in five games.

This time around, the 24-25-3-2 Buzzers have 16-year-old identical twins Dylan and Ty Jackson amongst their leading scorers as

the Oakville duo has combined for 111 points in their rookie Jr. A campaign. Twenty-year-old forward Cameron Searles led the team with 67 points.

Meanwhile, the 36-12-3-3 Raiders scored 58 fewer goals than last year's powerhouse squad — which sent star forwards Jack Jacome, and local native Josh Dickinson to star for the NCAA's top-10-ranked team at Clarkson University — but allowed just seven more this season thanks in part to an experienced defence corps.

Another OHL castoff, 20-year-old centre Jason Smith, tied for the team lead in scoring with fifth-year Raider Andrew Court and Walters will be leaning on 1998-born forwards Brendan D'Agostino, Jordan Crocker and Jonathan Hampton for some clutch goals.

OJHL South/West Conference Best-of-7 quarterfinal series

- Game 1
Thursday March 1
St. Michael's at Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Game 2
Saturday March 3
St. Michael's at Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- Game 3
Sunday, March 4
Georgetown at St. Michael's 2 p.m.
- Game 4
Tuesday, March 6
Georgetown at St. Michael's 7:30 p.m.
- x-Game 5
Wednesday March 7
St. Michael's at Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- x-Game 6
Friday, March 9
Georgetown at St. Michael's 7:30 p.m.
- x-Game 7
Saturday, March 10
St. Michael's at Georgetown, 7:30 p.m.
- x-if necessary

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