

SPORTS & LEISURE

Last-second goal puts Raiders in driver's seat

Whelan's tally gives Raiders 2-0 lead after Georgetown romps in opener

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Overtime hasn't been kind to the Georgetown Raiders over the past couple of years, so Jeremy Whelan's seemingly fluke game-winning goal on Monday night just as regulation time ran out was greeted as an overdue sign of good fortune in the visitors' dressing room at Burlington's Central Arena afterward.

The fourth-place Raiders escaped with a 4-3 triumph over the fifth-seeded Burlington Cougars in a contest that appeared destined for some tense extra time. Instead, the Raiders stunned the 600 fans in attendance with the controversial goal at 19:59 and are now ahead 2-0 in the OHA Provincial Jr. A Hockey League best-of-7 quarter-final after trouncing the Cougars 8-2 in Saturday's curtain-raiser. They will host game three tonight (Wednesday) at the Alcott Arena starting at 8 p.m.

Georgetown trailed game two 3-2 with only four minutes remaining in the third period and

a senseless Zak Ray roughing penalty appeared to give the Cougars a reprieve from some relentless offensive attacks by the Raiders. But Adam DeJong stole the puck from Burlington defender Josh Shrum in the neutral zone and was able to wrist his partial breakaway shot under the arm of goalie Eddie Davey for the equalizer.

Then, with overtime almost certainly as the last few seconds of the final frame ticked down and forechecking aggressively as they had throughout the fast-paced game, the Raiders forced a turnover in Burlington's zone with under 10 seconds remaining. Rob Sgarbossa's no-look centring pass from the corner was batted out of the air by Whelan towards the net, off Burlington goalie Eddie Davey, then agonizingly rolled over the goal line for the clinching marker. The Burlington bench smashed sticks in protest and wouldn't leave the ice surface, claiming that time had expired, but referee Mike Bolibruck stood by his decision.

"I was just trying to get it at the net and I didn't even know I scored. It's just overwhelming,"



The Burlington Cougars, neither by hook nor crook, could keep up with the Georgetown Raiders Saturday in the opening game of the teams' best-of-seven Provincial Jr. A Hockey League playoff series at Alcott Arena. Here, Georgetown's Ryan Ford (40) tries to escape from Burlington's John Cassels during Georgetown's 8-2 win. The Raiders also won 4-3 Monday in Burlington to take a 2-0 series lead.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

said Whelan, whose former team, his hometown Pickering Panthers, lost a league-record six-overtime game to the Toronto Jr. Canadiens on Saturday. "Sgarby passed it out to me the first time and I fanned on the shot. The second time, I batted it out of the air, the puck hit (Davey's) blocker and trickled in. Unbelievable. But this series isn't over yet."

The Cougars led 2-1 after the first period but were frustrated on the power play, unable to score on a couple of two-man advantages, instead giving up a short-handed marker to Whelan on a harmless-looking one-on-one rush. George Lovatsis tapped in a power play rebound for the only scoring in the second period, followed by Michael Budd's second goal for Burlington early in the third to put the hosts up 3-2.

Burlington went 2 for 14 with the man advantage through the first two games and has given up three shorthanded goals. In fact, the Raiders, who outshot the Cougars 47-41, seemed to be even more dangerous on offence when short a man.

"I don't know why that is, but whatever works I guess," added

Monday's first-star Whelan, who had a 28-goal campaign. "We'll take them as we can get 'em. We don't care if it's shorthanded or power play, just as long as we win, we're happy."

The Raiders, 0-3 in overtime in last year's playoffs, had been unable to post an OT win in 11 consecutive games dating back to last season until they scored a 4-3 victory in Brampton Nov. 9.

Marc Stuart picked up both wins in goal for the Raiders as coach James Richmond had a difficult decision to make heading into the series. Twenty-year-old Keaton Hartigan saw the lion's share of action in the nets during the regular season and posted a 16-11-3-2 record, although he gave up a combined 16 goals in late-season losses to Brampton and Hamilton. Stuart had a 12-1-0-0 record down the stretch for Georgetown and his play in an 8-1 regular-season finale romp over host Hamilton helped earn the Raiders home-ice advantage in the Burlington series.

"We trust both of our goalies and to be honest we could play either one of them and come out with a victory, no problem,"

Whelan said. "It just happened that Stuey played great the last game of the year so we'll just roll with whoever until it ends."

In Saturday's opener, Georgetown's Matt Carter struck twice 3:26 into the first period and despite a Burlington charge in the middle stanza to cut the hosts' lead to 3-2, the Raiders again hounded the Cougar defence and were rewarded with breakaway goals by Lovatsis and Ryan Ford. Carter, the 19-year-old from Mississauga, finished with a hat trick on the night, with Kyle Schwende chipping in a pair. Jon Southgate rounded out the goal-getting and Stuart made 36 stops.

Game four of the series is slated for Burlington on Friday, with game five, if necessary, back at the Alcott Arena Saturday facing off at 7:30 p.m.

In the other OPJHL West Division first-round series, the first-place Brampton Capitals lost 8-6 to guest Milton on Monday night, tying the series 1-1. Oakville and Hamilton are up 3-0 over Mississauga and Streetsville, respectively.

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Burlington Cougars' goalie Eddie Davey (right) drops to the ice as Georgetown Raiders players mob Jeremy Whelan following his goal with one second left Monday that gave Georgetown a 4-3 win. *Photo by Eamonn Maher*

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