

SPORTS & LEISURE

Over and out

Raiders fall 2-1 in game five to Blades as solid season comes to an end

EAMONN MAHER
Staff Writer

Seemingly just a step ahead of the Georgetown Raiders through most of their playoff series, the Oakville Blades captured their third West Division championship in five years Friday night on home ice with a 2-1 win.

The Blades got the go-ahead goal early in the second period on the power play from Julian Cima-damore and then employed a shut-down strategy that allowed only a couple of good Raider scoring chance during the remainder of the contest.

After falling behind 3-0 in the best-of-7 OHA Provincial Jr. A Hockey League series, the Raiders pulled off a 4-3 double-overtime victory at home last Wednesday to spark hopes of a miracle comeback.

Georgetown scored the opening goal in game five as Trevor Branning broke free with the man advantage, but a defensive breakdown led to Oakville's equalizer a short time later. Outshooting the Blades again by a 32-29 count didn't alter the outcome as Georgetown's marksmen were frozen out, going 4 for 32 on the power play in the series.

"The effort was there but unfortunately we came up a bit short," said Raider captain Evan Zych, who shook off a knee injury suffered in the series opener to play in the last two games.

"We had some discipline problems earlier in the series and a team like Oakville is going to take advantage of that. When you look at it, some people were picking us to finish sixth or seventh in the division this year, so to get to this point is a good accomplishment. Still, when you lose a close game like that, it's tough when you realize the season is over."

The junior careers for a number of key Raider players came to an end with the defeat, including star netminder Marc Stuart, defencemen Mike Paolo and Scott Levitt, along

with forwards Andrew Ella and John Seymour, who was scratched for the last two games of the series.

The season may not be over for 17-year-old centre Andy Bathgate of Georgetown, who will likely join the Ontario Hockey League's Belleville Bulls for their playoff run. As the top seed in the Eastern Conference, the Bulls are being tabbed as a strong contender for a berth in the Memorial Cup in Kitchener in May and Bathgate said he'd love to be part of the team in some way, even if it's as a spectator.

"I'll be waiting for a call from Belleville," said the 6-foot-1, 170-pound Bathgate, who had an assist in five games with the Bulls when he signed with the OHL club in December.

"Just to be involved with any playoff action would be fantastic. I was able to play up there in the Christmas holidays and it was a great experience."

As for next year's Raiders, head coach James Richmond fully intends to be back for a third season, while director of hockey operations Lonnie Freeman is no longer with the team.

Player-wise, a number of Raiders have scholarship opportunities but a strong core is eligible to return, including Zych, Chris Borges, Marcus Pryde, Trevor Branning, Kyle Essery, Fred Gervasi, Lukas Ciotti, Jeremy Wick, Robert Brennan, Mark McGowan, goalie Paul Claxton and Anthony Luciani.

"We have a young team and you look forward to next year but you can't overlook the contributions of our 20-year-olds," Richmond said. "I'm proud of my guys. We had that stinker of a second period in game two of the Oakville series, but other than that I thought we played well against a very good hockey team."

The Blades will now face the Aurora Tigers in the OPJHL semifinals beginning in Oakville Saturday evening. Georgetown's rookie camp is scheduled to take place April 28-30 at the Westwood Arena.

(Eamonn Maher can be reached at emaher@independentfreepress.com)



Georgetown Raiders' captain Evan Zych takes a moment for contemplation while teammates Fred Gervasi, Jeremy Wick and goalie Marc Stuart console each other after a season-ending loss to the host Oakville Blades on Friday night. The Blades won the OPJHL's West Division title in five games over the Raiders, capped by a grinding 2-1 triumph in the finale. *Photo by Eamonn Maher*

Zeke McCandless dies at 77

Hockey Heritage loses member

EAMONN MAHER
Staff Writer

Robert 'Zeke' McCandless, the 2003 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award recipient for his 38 years of involvement in the sport here, died recently at his winter home in Florida.

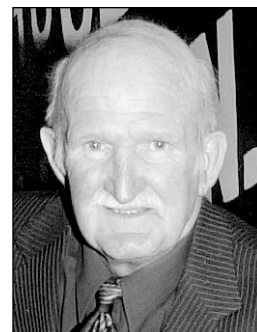
He was 77.

McCandless was involved with minor hockey in Georgetown even before his three sons were old enough to play and he later spent several years with the Jr. B Gemini in a number of capacities.

"We join the community of Georgetown in mourning the loss of a giant in our hockey heritage," said GHHC chairman Dave Kentner.

"The strength and successes of our current hockey organizations in Georgetown can be directly traced back to the hard work that people like Zeke did to help build the strong base that's in place today and we see that with the competitive minor hockey program that we have."

Not long after his Jr. C playing career was over, McCandless began volunteering with the Legion Saturday Morning youth leagues, also serving as an executive member, team manager,



ZEKE McCANDLESS

referee and coach. In 1980, he became equipment manager for the Jr. B Gemini and later spent two years as club president, doing everything from selling sponsorships to building dressing room stalls for the players.

"It was a lot of work and a lot of worries," McCandless said upon receiving his Hockey Heritage award. "But it was a challenge and I really enjoyed the camaraderie with the other people on the executive."

One of his biggest accomplishments was to help get the Gemini out of debt, and after a run to the league final in 1985, McCandless and a couple of other executive members threw in \$500 apiece to balance the books.

He also sat on the executive for the GMHA's Support Group and chaired the committee that organized the first game at the Gordon Alcott Arena in 1975, pitting the Sunny Acres midget Raiders against a team from Finland in front of a capacity crowd.

A family-only funeral service was held in Wasaga Beach last Friday.

The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the Collingwood General & Marine Hospital.

I SHOP AT HOME!

SHOP HALTON HILLS

This message brought to you by your local newspaper

A GOOD REASON TO SHOP LOCAL

#2. Shopping local saves you money. Out of town shops have done a good job of convincing us all that sole traders = expensive, but the evidence just isn't there to back this up. If you add in travel, parking costs, fees to transport larger items home and your time, the overall cost is often much higher.

THE INDEPENDENT & FREE PRESS

YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

905.873.0301