

# Brennan looking to help midget Hawks take flight again

Chris Brennan isn't promising a quick fix to an ailing midget program.

After all, the seasoned local coach has been around long enough to know that building a contender — at any level — takes time. Be that as it may, his return marks an awfully encouraging first step toward revitalizing the Winterhawks' oldest reps, who — shall we say — have been less than competitive over the past few years.

The reasons for that are quite varied, depending on who you speak with. But the time for assessing blame is over.

"I'm hoping to get things back on track," said the double-A midgets' new head coach, who was behind the bench for the Winterhawks' last OMHA championship win — the single-A midgets' near-perfect 2002-03 campaign.

Bringing far more experience to the table than any skipper since Arnie Parcels (mid-90s to 2002), Brennan admits his return to his hometown organization was met with initial skepticism.

"After I took over I held a parent/player meeting where just a handful of people showed up. The reason I heard was that there was a lack of trust that the new coach would make a difference."

Rest assured, he will. Having developed much of his playbook and conditioning regimen from former NHL assistant/OHL head coach E.J. McGuire during his mid-90s stint with the Jr. B Guelph Platers, Brennan brings a junior-calibre program — the kind seen in many triple-A centres.

That's partly because he's instructed with a number of them, including the Hurricanes, Marlies and Jr. Canadiens.

"Honestly, at first I was a little intimidated by Chris, but he's a very impressive coach," said Chris Whiting, a forward with the 2002-03 OMHA champs, whose kid brother Mason is hoping to be part of this coming season's midgets. "He's got a great structure and he obviously had us all on the same page that year. Chris knows what he's doing."

It's not just former players who are quick to praise Brennan.

"Chris brings great passion and leadership and we're hoping he can be a mentor to some of our other coaches," said MMHA first vice-president/rep convenor Tracey Taylor.

Added returning president Bob Barrett, "It's great to have someone of his calibre and experience with our midgets. We're hoping



## In the stands

with STEVE LeBLANC

he'll be a drawing card to get some players back."

That last comment refers to the widely-held belief that many players have opted to compete with their friends at the house-league or high school level rather than at rep. Factoring heavily into this is the fact that, unlike many neighbouring regions, in Halton players cannot play both club and high school hockey.

Brennan is convinced there's a number of players capable of being part of the rep midgets who currently aren't, and is hoping to lure them into the Winterhawks' fold.

His plan of attack includes a series of summer skates at Milton Sports Centre — the next few set for this coming Monday (7 p.m.), July 23 (9 p.m.) and July 30 (9 p.m.) — that the new midget coach stressed offer a great deal more than just scrimmaging.

"These are high-tempo junior-ish practices

designed to work on the various elements of skating, passing, stick-handling and conditioning. The skates have been exceptionally well received," said Brennan, who plans on taking the Winterhawks to high-profile tournaments and is looking to re-establish a long-departed working relationship with Milton's Jr. A club. "When guys come off the ice exhausted but are saying it's the best practice they've ever had, you know you're heading in the right direction."

While the feedback from the sessions have been positive, the turnout, so far, hasn't been encouraging, with just 17 players out to most skates, including several minor midgets.

Concerned about the likelihood of icing both a midget and minor midget AA team, Brennan is urging players who've left the rep ranks or think they're capable of donning a Winterhawks' jersey to try out.

Prospective players can call him at (905) 876-3274 for more information or simply go out for a practice, which includes a \$15 fee.

"We're hoping to change the attitude of midget hockey in Milton," he said.

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