



TAKING A BREATH – Players at the Essex 73's 2006-07 training camp take a rest on the bench during a practice Aug. 17. Close to 100 players ages 16-20 are attending the camp. The team's line-up is expected to be completed by Labour Day.

73's training camp brings in young talent

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Nearly 100 players hit the ice at Essex Memorial Arena Aug. 17, vying for the 23 spots available on the Essex 73's 2006-2007 roster.

It was the third practice of training camp and with about half of last year's Great Lakes Junior "C" championship team gone, there's ample opportunity for younger players to fill the gap, said assistant coach Jordy Piroski.

"Any time you make it to the All-Ontario finals and then lose some guys off that team, there's going to be a huge gap to fill," he said.

Last season, the 73's won their fourth Great Lakes Junior "C" Hockey League title in five years when they defeated the Wheatley Sharks in six games.

They advanced to the All-Ontario finals in May but lost to the Penetang Kings.

Fourth year veteran R.J. Hotts, 20, said there may be a little pressure for the team to continue its successful run.

"We've lost a few veterans but we always seem to put together a good, competitive team," said Hotts, the team's leading scorer last season. "We're still going to be the team to beat this year."

About 50 players from the camp will be

released this week, said head coach Tony Piroski.

By the time they gear up for the season opener Sept. 19 against the Dresden Kings, there will be about a dozen young rookies on the team.

"We've got some kids out here that I'm really impressed with," Piroski said. "I really like a couple of the 16 year olds and the goaltenders look pretty good out there. The decisions are going to get pretty tough (this week)."

The loss of 12 veterans, who reached the league's age limit last year, as well as the demands of school and work commitments has the coach looking to the team's leaders to provide an example for younger players, on the ice and off.

"I'd like to see our leaders welcome the new guys, that's the key thing," Piroski said "You hear people talk about chemistry in sports – I think that's what a team's made up of."

All of last season's coaching staff and personnel are returning this year, including assistant coaches Lee Jones and Jamie McDermott.

The 73's will play their first exhibition game Aug. 29 against the Belle River Canadiens.

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