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WHERE'S THE PUCK?: Stouffville District Secondary School defenceman Dylan Harrison (second from left), and goalkeeper Graham Smith search frantically for a loose puck during action against King City Secondary School in Thursday's York Region Athletic Association junior hockey semi-final playoff contest at the Rec Centre. The host Spartans won the contest 5-2.

Photo by NICKY BEROFKY

Junior Spartans ice berth in York final

It's back to the York Regional Athletic Association (YRAA) finals for the Stouffville District Secondary School (SDSS) Spartans junior boys' hockey team.

The Spartans earned the right to contest the YRAA playoff championship for the second time in their three years of existence in the league when they defeated the King City S.S. Golden Invaders 5-2 Thursday afternoon at the Rec Centre.

Tyler Markle broke a 2-2 second period tie with his second goal of the game to give the Spartans a lead they would never relinquish.

Brad Clubine made it 4-2, with the SDSS squad adding a shorthanded marker into an empty Golden Invaders net in the dying seconds to clinch the big victory.

"Everybody did their job," said a contented Spartans coach Bill McKnight after the game.

A TOTAL TEAM EFFORT

McKnight suggested the key to the triumph was that everyone played according to the team's system.

"It was a team effort," he pointed out.

McKnight said Spartans goalie Graham Smith was solid in net, with strong support from his defencemen.

"The defence stood them (King City) up at the blueline."

Peter Mabley opened the scoring in the first period for the Spartans, with an assist from Clubine.

The Golden Invaders tied it to make it 1-1 heading into the second period.

Markle put the Spartans out in front again on a goal from Billy Scott in the second, with King

City knotting it once again.

But Markle clicked again from Clubine and Jamie Alston to restore the Spartans' lead.

Brett Jennings and Markle assisted Clubine's fourth Stouffville marker.

The Spartans managed the only goal of the third period when Cory Turchan added insult to injury for the Golden Invaders by scoring an empty netter with his team two men short.

McKnight said the Spartans were expecting a strong effort from King City.

"They're a good team, they're no slouches. We knew it was going to be close."

"But our boys were focussed from the start, and it's always good to score that first goal."

SPARTANS MOTIVATED

McKnight said his team is motivated by the fact they have yet to win a YRAA title.

They lost in the opening round of the playoffs last season after finishing first in the regular season.

"About half of last year's team is back. I think they want to make a mark."

The Spartans were missing regulars Dave Brown and Matt Sullivan for Thursday's semi-final.

Both should be ready for next week's final against either Alexander MacKenzie S.S. of Richmond Hill or Father Bressani Catholic High School of Woodbridge.

The date or neutral location of the title tilt was still unknown at press time.

McKnight said he expected it to be played Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, likely in Richmond Hill or Aurora.

New ball team and league coming to town



Sports Notes

Bruce Stapley

They won't be hitting the diamond for another month or two.

And as of Tuesday of this week they still didn't have an official name.

But when Howard Burkholder's intermediate men's fast pitch team takes to the field as the newest addition to the Oshawa City and District Fastball League this May, it will represent a sense of continuity that can only be appreciated by small town traditionalists.

For the reality is that Howard's team will likely play in front of a smattering of softball diehards on Wednesday nights this spring and summer.

But you won't find Howard fretting over whether he can convince enough people to come out and fill the stands for home games. He understands that today's young people are not always drawn to the game that has been a part of him ever since he was a kid growing up in Markham.

"There still is an interest in fast pitch in Stouffville, some of the older people still like it. But the younger people, unless they grew up with it, it's not a big deal. They have their own activities."

Howard recalls how teams he was with while growing up in the Markham of decades past would draw hundreds of fans to regular season games. But he admitted that even when his Stouffville Merchants Juniors were winning two, and almost three straight Ontario men's fastball championships back at the start of this decade, and placing as high as third in the national finals, the locals weren't beating a path to Memorial Park to watch them.

But he suggests that for those who choose to walk down to the park on a nice summer night to take in a game,

they may just be in for a treat.

With a nucleus consisting of former Merchants Byron Baranieski, sons Chris, Rich and Ryan Burkholder, and Rob Reesor, the team will have talent to be sure. As members of the now-defunct Uxbridge Bandits, this quartet helped that team to the Ontario title last season, followed by a surprising silver medal at the Eastern Canadian finals.

"With the nucleus of players we have we're going to be competitive with any team in the league," said Howard.

As for who comes along to fill out the roster, Howard said there could be a mix of local talent and out of town players.

Being a club team, Howard will be free to draw players from anywhere he chooses. But he doesn't plan to undertake a massive recruitment program in an attempt to stack the team. His own sense of tradition and loyalty to those who ever showed loyalty to him will certainly be a factor.

"Our first priority is to those who were on our team in the early 1990's (the Merchants). But I also realize that a lot of them have moved on, or have different interests now."

A proven player himself, Howard suggests that while he's still fit enough to play, it will depend upon circumstances that evolve.

On the other hand, he feels it would be too hard on him to produce if he were to make sporadic appearances.

As always, Howard will be looking to centre his team around the basic ideals he has believed in from the beginning of his coaching career. He is looking for players who will fit in with a team whose priorities lean more towards making it to church on Sunday than partying into the wee hours on a Saturday night.

As always with teams Howard coaches, sportsmanship will be paramount.

And if the local citizenry choose to come on down and root for the home team on a nice summer Wednesday night, then that's all the better.

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