

SPORTS

Spirit start slow but finish strong to tame Wolves

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Road kill... The Spirit of Stouffville used a familiar recipe to all but eliminate the Shelburne Wolves from the Provincial Junior A Hockey League playoffs Friday night in Shelburne.

The Spirit started slow then finished with a rolling boil to earn a 5-4 victory.

The Stouffville squad had to add some extra ingredients as seven regulars were sidelined due to suspension, illness and work obligations.

Two players were borrowed from the Stouffville juvenile Clippers, with another trio from the Richmond Hill AA Stars bantams also added to the mix.

For the third time in their last four games, the Spirit scored the winning goal late in the game after overcoming a two-goal deficit.

Trailing 3-1 after the first period, they pulled even in the second before Dave Zelasko broke the tie with his second goal of the game and 22nd of the season with just under five minutes to play in the third.

Phil Barski's shorthanded marker with two minutes on the clock, his 22nd of campaign as well, clinched it.

The Wolves scored in the final seconds after pulling their goalie for a sixth attacker.

While Spirit head coach Brian Perrin said he didn't like the idea of always having to come from behind, he suggested his team's strong finishes are adding to his players' character.

"It's not a good habit to get into," said Perrin. "But it proves that we're not giving up, we're finding new ways to win. That builds confidence."

Jesse Johnston netted his seventh of the year for the Spirit. Andrew Archer of the Richmond Hill

Stars also scored.

Kevin Boyle was adept in the Spirit net.

The win, the fourth in five games, left the Spirit 13 points ahead of the Wolves in the Central Conference's eighth and final playoff spot.

Perrin said the recent victories have helped erase memories of 12 losses in 15 games through late January.

"I'm just happy to see this new confidence. Before it was all doom and gloom."

He said the turnaround has come as a result of strong goalkeeping and tight defence.

"We're in the top four in the conference in goalkeeping now."

The Spirit trail the seventh-place Thornhill Rattlers by four points with seven games left in the regular season.

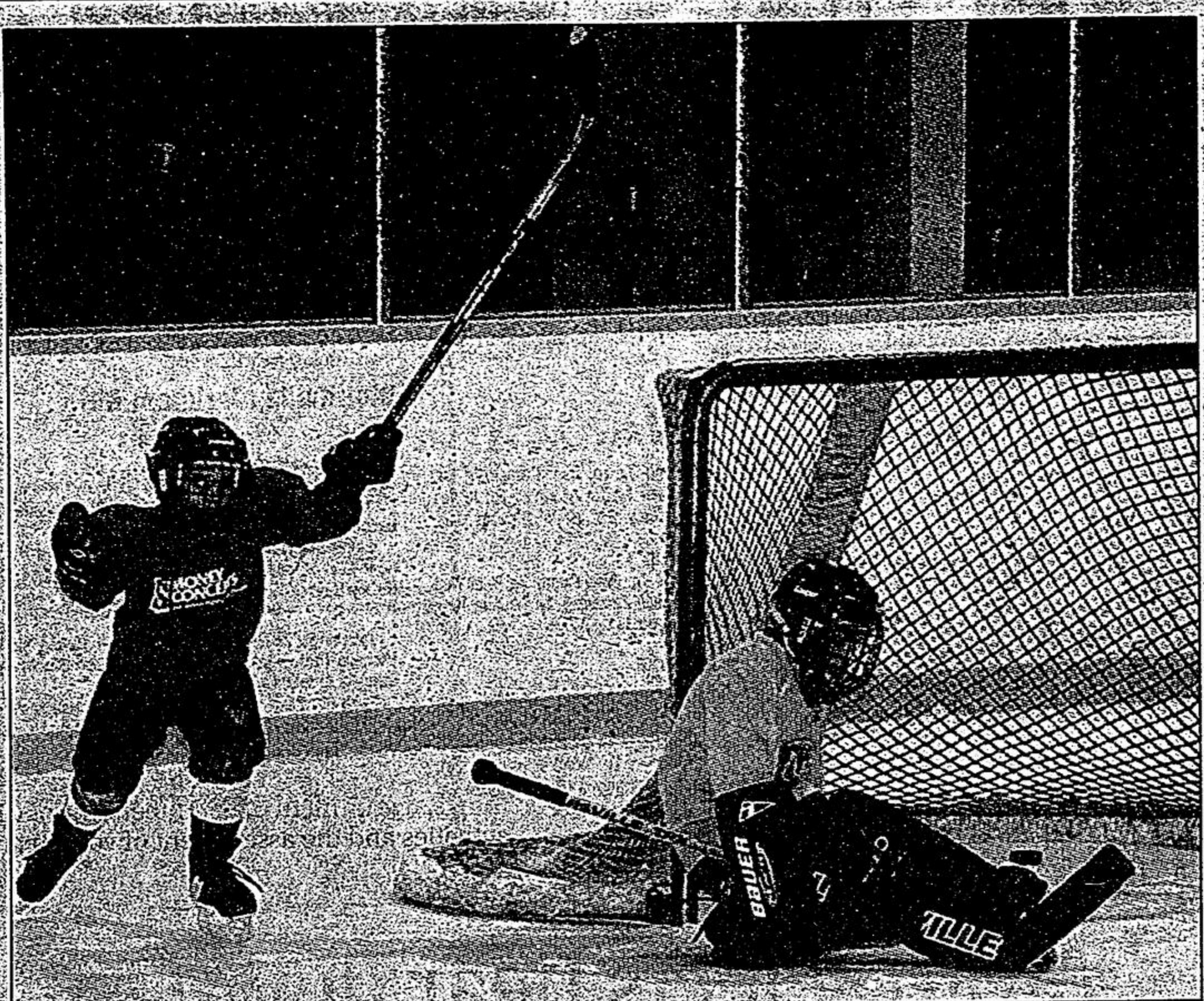
But Perrin said he's more concerned that his team just continue to play well rather than move ahead in the standings as they will be up against a formidable opponent in the first round of the playoffs no matter where they finish.

"In a best-of-five series anything can happen."

The Spirit are at home to the last-place Durham Huskies Thursday at the rec centre.

Spiritually speaking, Jason Saunders, the North York Rangers player who had his hand cut by a skate during a brawl following last Thursday's rec centre game with the Spirit, will undergo surgery this Thursday to retrieve tendons on his two middle fingers.

Rangers head coach Dan Poliziani said the two fingers weren't broken as originally thought but were cut to the knuckle. A third finger required stitching as well. Saunders was released from the Emergency Unit at Markham Stouffville at 2 a.m. Friday with the fingers in a cast. Poliziani said the 20-year-old Saunders should recover in six to 10 weeks. He said a video of the game taken by a local cable TV company showed Saunders' hand was stepped on by a player with whom he was fighting, not a linesman rushing in to break up the fight as the team originally stated.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Money Concepts forward Brad Burrows (left), team celebrates a goal as goalie Sean Gibson tries to gather himself in during Saturday's Whitchurch Stouffville Minor Hockey Association tyke houseleague action at the rec centre.

Zonnekeyn is getting his kicks in Belgium

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Ryan Zonnekeyn is one step closer to realizing his dream.

The 16-year-old Stouffville area resident has caught on with a First Provincial Men's Soccer League team in Belgium.

The teen surprised everybody by cracking the roster of the KVV Coxide squad on Belgium's North Sea shore after deciding to test the waters in that country in November.

Zonnekeyn is the youngest player on the men's outfit and will stay with the club through season's end in May.

Ryan did intensive training last summer, and he wanted to go to Europe to play outdoor soccer for the winter, said Ryan's father, Richard Zonnekeyn.

Ryan travelled to Belgium on the advice of a Toronto-area indoor soccer complex operator

who offered to act as his agent in his attempt to join a junior European soccer team.

"I initially took him over there to keep him on grass for the winter," the elder Zonnekeyn said. His agent had advised him to do that.

The plan worked. After just two tryouts with the KVV Coxide team, Ryan made the team.

"He was all ready to go and play with the juniors," said Richard.

Ryan is attending a boarding school during the week that includes three hours of soccer training a day in addition to his studies.

"He's getting in a total of 30 hours of soccer a week," noted Richard.

Ryan must pay his own way at the school, but is put up in an area hotel on weekends by the team.

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