

SPORTS



PHOTO/LORI EMMERSON

IN HOT PURSUIT

Tippet Richardson's Justin Moule (left), tries to catch up to Legion 459's Sam O'Farrell as he attempts to fire a shot on goal during Saturday's Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association house league minor novice contest at the rec centre. The Tippet Richardson team prevailed 4-3. Adam Brown scored three goals for the winners and Jonathan Naylor added one.

HOCKEY: Spirit lose playoff opener to the Collingwood Blues

Questionable goal hurts Spirit

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Mugged in Collingwood. That was the cry of the Spirit of Stouffville after a 6-5 defeat at the hands of the Collingwood Blues in the opener of their best-of-five opening round Ontario Provincial Junior A Hockey league playoff series.

A disallowed Spirit goal and a questionable Blues marker proved the difference as the Spirit recovered from some early jitters to hold their own against the first-place Blues, who finished a full 37 points ahead of the Spirit in the league standings.

"We were robbed," Spirit head coach Brian Perrin lamented. "He (referee Joe Park) gave them a goal that never went in and he took one away from us."

Perrin insisted the sixth Blues goal, scored from a scramble with three minutes remaining in the third period, was kicked in by a Collingwood player after the whistle had been blown when the net was jarred out of position.

"The guy kicked the puck in as he knocked the net off."

Earlier in the period with the Spirit trailing 4-3, Andrew Francone's apparent goal was scrubbed after initially being ruled a goal.

"Their goalie reached back and pulled it out," said Perrin. "I've never been so disappointed with a referee. Usually he (Park) calls a good game, but I guess the crowd got to him."

The Spirit, who were playing their first ever playoff game, fell behind 2-1 in the first period, then trailed 4-1 midway through the second.

Francone netted the initial Stouffville marker.

Ryan Stovold and Phil Barski scored before the second period was out to bring the Spirit to within a goal.

Barski knotted it at 4-4 on a Spirit power play four minutes into the third period.

The Blues regained the lead on a power play of their own a minute later, then added their final marker with three minutes to go.

Dave Zelasko scored a power play goal with 21 seconds on the clock and Spirit goalkeeper Kevin Boyle on the bench in favour of a sixth attacker.

But the Spirit couldn't get control on the face off that followed and the Blues salvaged the win.

Kevin Edgar picked up two assists for the Spirit.

The Blues held a 29-27 advantage in shots on goal.

Perrin said the Spirit were the equal of the Blues on the night.

"Other than the first five minutes when we had some nervousness, I think we played with them the whole game. It was just a few untimely calls that cost us the game."

Perrin praised his players for their efforts against the powerful Blues.

"They didn't give up. They played with a lot of heart. It was a real team effort."

Spirit assistant coach Ken Burrows said that despite the loss, the Spirit now know they can keep up with the Blues.

"We should have a one game lead," Burrows said. "But we're pretty confident. Collingwood is a very good team, but the players now believe they are beatable. We just have to play our best."

Game two takes place tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the rec centre.

Perrin feels a similar effort as his players gave Tuesday will send the series back to Collingwood tomorrow night tied at one game apiece.

"Hopefully we can carry Tuesday's effort into Thursday's game," he said.



BRIAN PERRIN
Spirit coach upset with referee's ruling on winning goal

No red line next season signifies a faster game

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Three line passes will become the norm as the Ontario Provincial Junior A Hockey League looks to go into the new millennium with a faster, cleaner approach to the game.

The league has voted 25-7 to eliminate the centre red line next season, with the final approval yet to come from the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association.

It is hoped that by taking the step, previously travelled by American and Canadian colleges that the game will become more wide open with less room for goons.

An increase in stick work, along with an emphasis on the neutral zone trap which prevents the faster offensive players from breaking loose, led to the change.

Spirit owner Ed Hakonson said he would have preferred to receive more information before adopting the rule.

"We sat on the fence. We wanted to know more about what it would do to the game," he said.

Hakonson was concerned the move might have an initial effect of making the league's top teams even stronger. However, he thought it would probably make for a better league a few years down the road.

"I think it will upgrade the game. I'm definitely for more hockey and less WWF wrestling out on the ice."



ED HAKONSON
Owner has some concerns with no centre line

Hakonson said it will be essential for teams to adapt quickly to the new style of play.

"If you aren't willing to adjust you won't last long."

Spirit general manager Dieter Schmidt said while he's not convinced the new rule will make a huge difference, it should weed out the rowdies.

"I'm not sure it will speed the game up as much as they are saying it will. And the goons can still belt people around in front of the net. But there's definitely going to be an advantage for the skaters."

Schmidt said when he attended an American college game in Albany, N.Y. last year that the absence of the red line made for a faster game.

"It certainly opened it up. The goons just can't keep up."

"College games are pretty fast," Spirit head coach Brian Perrin added. "It should speed up the game."

Schmidt and Perrin said the search will be on for players who can combine speed and agility when the team prepares for next season.

Schmidt also said the league is also considering eliminating appeals for stick and goalkeepers pads' measurements during games. All but two teams, the Newmarket Hurricanes and Caledon Canadians of the Western Conference, were in favour of a gentleman's agreement that would see teams refrain from asking game officials to make such measurements. Violations can result in a two-minute penalty.

Schmidt said the league is looking into allowing players involved in a fight to remain in the game. They would be ejected only if they got into a second altercation. The league plans to consult with the CAHA about the proposed change.

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PLAYOFFS

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GAME			
Home 2	Fri., Feb. 26th	Markham	8:00 p.m.
Away 3	Sun., Feb. 28th	Aurora	7:00 p.m.
Home 4	Mon., March 1st	Markham	8:15 p.m.
Away 5	Tues., March 2nd	Aurora	7:30 p.m.

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