

Rival teams give Spirit respect

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He recalled that while local businessman Ed Hakonson rescued the team from early extinction just months into its first season in the fall of 1995, the next challenge involved keeping the franchise in town.

With that battle won, he suggests the successfully phased-in shift of ownership from Hakonson to current owners Zeev Werek and Larry Goldberg has made for even greater stability.

"Stable ownership feeds down to a more stable front office, and from there on down to the people who stamp the tickets and sell the tee-shirts on game nights."

The arrival of head coach Brian Perrin and assistants Ken Burrows and Craig Donovan in the spring of 1998 set the stage for the type of on-ice product that would see the club make its first break through.

"When Brian Perrin came here he had credibility from his years with the Newmarket Hurricanes. We had a coaching staff that had proven itself."

McKinnon suggests having that proven trio preside over everything from initial scouting and assessment through line changes during games has made for a quality roster.

"It starts with having the same coaches in place. They are able to stay with the players a few years they've picked them out and worked with them on a daily basis."

From an organizational standpoint, McKinnon said the club has established itself for the future with the addition of people who have their own unique tal-



KEN BURROWS: Logged countless hours in the Spirit's early days searching for untapped talent.

ents to offer.

"We now have a solid foundation of community minded and knowledgeable people who can keep it going."

The proof of the Spirit's new success lies in the fact the team is now attracting players with proven abilities.

"We are no longer bringing in kids to fill out the roster. We're selecting established players to fill a specific position."

The Spirit's on-ice exploits aren't going unnoticed.

"We're gaining respect around the league," notes McKinnon. "More and more scouts are coming to the arena. They come to see first and second-place teams because the players are of a higher level."

He hopes the club's new higher profile will serve as an incentive for Stouffville-area players to aspire towards wearing a Spirit uniform.

"There are several Stouffville kids playing at the AAA level in Richmond Hill or Markham. Hopefully they can someday make the team."

Burrows believes the Spirit began its turnaround with the arrival of his friend and former head coach Dan Larmer midway through the 1996-97 season.

"That was when the players first started to show a lot of pride," said Burrows. "Dan demanded hard work and more important, respect from the players for the organization."

Burrows also credits Larmer with attracting to the organization solid hockey people like McKinnon and Eldon Wagg.

Burrows, like McKinnon a long-time Stouffville resident, was initially brought in by Larmer to start up a scouting system. He recalls spending endless hours with Larmer watching upper level minor hockey, junior B and C games in search of prospective talent.

Their work started to pay dividends with the addition of marquee players Darcy King and Kevin Edgar, who finished near the top of the league scoring race in 1997-98 as the Spirit began to experience modest success on the ice.

Today, the cardboard box has given way to a polished scouting system including team statistician Gary Tobin, game announcer Dave Dennis, and Thunder Bay resident John Mason, who was responsible for landing Hearst residents and Spirit stars Michel Bond and Alain Veilleux.

McKinnon said the Spirit's recent success has been a source of immense satisfaction for all that have played a part.

"It's nice to be on the ride."

Midget Clippers win three of four

The Stouffville Toronto Yorke Veterinary Ophthalmologists midget A Clippers had a good week of action on the ice after taking three out of four games in York Simcoe play.

The Clippers posted a home ice win over Bradford 6-2 and road verdicts against Markham 6-2 and Aurora 4-2. The lone loss came at the hands of host Newmarket as the Clippers squandered a 4-3 third-period lead to come out on the short end of a 5-4 decision.

Scoring for the Clippers in those games were: Andrew Gibson six goals, two assists; Chris Carruthers three goals, six assists; Marcus D'Annunzio three goals; Shawn Burns two goals, two assists; Brad Patterson one goal, three assists; Richard Mulder one goal, two assists; Jean Bourqui and Justin Amyotte one goal, one assist; Spiros Tsipopoulos one goal; Dylan Harrison four assists; Tyler McMaster and Andrew McKay three assists; Michael Sullivan, Richard Mulder and Fraser Smith one assist.

Thomson sparks mite selects to close victory

Daryl Thomson scored a goal and added two assists to propel the Stouffville mite select Clippers to a 4-3 win over Uxbridge in a Dec. 3 hockey encounter.

Chris Jupp and Jay Averill each added a goal and assist and Mitchell King scored once. Trevor Carrick, Devin King and Joe Deveny were each credited with one assist.

Spirit snowed out

Bad weather conditions on Monday played havoc with the Stouffville Spirit's scheduled Provincial Junior A Hockey League road contest against the Huntsville Wildcats on Tuesday.

The game, which was postponed due to the large snowfall, is scheduled to be replayed Jan. 21.

The Spirit will also be in Huntsville for a regularly scheduled road game on Jan. 19.

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