

Bantam Stars shine in winning provincial girls' hockey title

Coaching a team of first-year bantam A hockey players, Charles Giliberto was hoping his Markham-Stouffville North Pointe Chev Olds-1 and 1 Construction-OAS and Hazmasters Stars would get acclimated to playing against older and more experienced talent this season.

It took a while for the Stars to get accustomed to their new surroundings.

But as the season progressed, the Stars exceeded Giliberto's expectations.

And to cap off their season, the Stars skated off with the bantam A provincial title in last weekend's Ontario Women's Hockey Association Championship weekend by defeating the Kitchener Falcons 3-1 in the title game in Mississauga.

"Given that the majority of the girls were first-year bantams, we wanted to make a run for (the provincial title) next year. We just wanted to go as far as we could. To get to the championship weekend was a bonus," Giliberto conceded. "Winning the title this year was definitely ahead of schedule. To get the gold medal was fantastic."

Stephanie Giliberto, Jennifer Kramar and Hayley McMeekin each scored once for the Stars.



In qualifying for the OWSA Championship weekend, the Stars played in a regional round-robin against five teams and finished first after defeating Oshawa 2-1, Whitby 2-0, the Lady Marlies 7-1 and Aurora 3-2. Markham-Stouffville's lone setback in the round-robin was a 2-1 loss to Durham West.

At the Championship weekend, the Stars received a late third-period goal from Lindsay Brown to edge Kingston 2-1 in its first game.

After battling Thunder Bay to a 3-3 tie, the Stars then received a stellar netminding effort from Danielle Beattie and goals from McMeekin and Sarah Magee to blank the Oshawa Panthers 2-0 in its quarter-final game.

Facing Niagara Falls in its semi-final encounter, Markham-Stouffville got goals from Kramar, Ashley Lucas and McMeekin and strong netminding from Danielle Paterson to emerge with a 3-0 victory.

Other members that contributed to the club's effort were: Erin Carter, Sarah Mikos, Melanie Paterson, Jill Morrison, Amber Wright, Kristine Sabourin and Shannon Hagarty.

In explaining his club's success, Giliberto was quick to point out he possessed a good nucleus of players as more than half of this year's team were members of the squad that cap-

tered the provincial peewee title last season.

What really made the difference, he thought, was the team's ability to peak at the right time. The proof came over the last month when the girls captured their league title and followed that up with a tournament title in Brampton, which featured 375 teams, and then the provincial crown.

"I've seen too many teams that start out great in September and October, then taper off. I think there's some overkill when teams start out great that early.

"You have to treat the season like a marathon and not a sprint. In an eight-month season you've got to peak at the right time.

The last two to three months we were on a roll," said Giliberto, who was assisted behind the bench by Mike Hagarty, Warren Magee and trainer Marion Morrison.

As for next season, Giliberto said his team will move up to the bantam AA level. This level, he noted, is the highest calibre that the team can move into in girls' hockey.

The victory by the bantam A Stars is the second provincial title earned by a Markham-Stouffville entry this season. The Stars' intermediate team also claimed the provincial gold medal.

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