

SPORTS

Hockey Spartans win quarter-final squeaker

Stouffville Secondary faces Markham High in York region semi-final

Jamie Hewitt felt his Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans senior boys' hockey team didn't play one of its best games Monday when it hosted St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School (Maple) in a York Region Athletic Association quarter-final single-elimination game.

But at the same time, the Spartans head coach said his charges didn't play one of their worst games.

Fortunately for the Spartans, the positives outweighed the negatives as they advanced to the semi-finals with a thrilling 4-3 overtime win.

Brandon Walker scored two goals, including the game winner with 1:04 remaining in the first five-minute sudden-death overtime period.

Mark Sullivan and Justin Hitchen added the other goals for the Spartans.

"We didn't play bad and we didn't play well," Hewitt said. "We had a lot of scoring chances but their goalie played well. They're a talented team."

SECOND-PERIOD RALLY

Trailing 1-0 after one period seemed to serve as a wake-up call for the Spartans, who rallied for three unanswered goals in the second period to take a 3-1 advantage.

But just seven seconds into the third period, St. Joan of Arc scored to narrow the deficit.

"And with 45 seconds remaining in regu-



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Despite being pressured by St. Joan of Arc defender Mario Barillo (far right), Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans' captain Chris Flanagan backhanded the puck just wide of St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School goalkeeper Alessandro DeMarche in Monday's YRAA senior boys' hockey quarter-final contest at Stouffville Arena. The Spartans won 4-3 in overtime and advanced to the regional semifinals where they will host Markham District High School in a best-of-three series starting Friday at 1 p.m.

lation time, St. Joan of Arc scored the tying goal to force overtime and set the stage for Walker's overtime heroics.

Hewitt thought the difference in the game might have been the character his club has developed this season.

"St. Joan of Arc had plenty of momentum going into that overtime. But we

buckled down. Good teams find ways to win and we did. I thought we showed a lot of character in the overtime."

COSTLY VICTORY

The victory proved costly for the Spartans as forward Alex Bruno suffered a wrist injury and could be lost for the

remainder of the season.

With the victory, the Spartans will face the Markham District High School Marauders in a best-of-three semi-final series starting Friday at Stouffville Arena at 1 p.m.

During the regular season, the Spartans and Marauders battled to a 3-3 tie.

That tie represented the only non-win in the Spartans' regular season record.

The playing dates for the second and third game, if required, had yet to be determined as of press time.

The winner of this series will meet the victor of the other semi-final between Huron Heights Secondary School (Newmarket) and Cardinal Carter Catholic High School (Aurora) for the YRAA title.

Conceding his charges dodged a bullet against St. Joan of Arc, Hewitt said the road to the final won't get any easier. Especially against a Markham team that he says is "very good and talented."

"Every game from here on in is big. We're definitely where we'd like to be at this stage of the season. We've just got to take things one game at a time."

Senior Spartans cage consolation title

At the recent Spartan Senior Boys' Basketball Classic, the Spartans captured the consolation final with a 45-37 win over Sutton District High School.

Justin Brugger was high scorer for the Spartans with 14 points while Gavin Howe added 12.

The Unionville High School Wolves won the championship title with a 37-28 win over Brother Andre Catholic High School.

Spirit, Hurricanes set to renew heated rivalry

North Conference semifinal series starts tonight in Newmarket

Stouffville Spirit vs. Newmarket Hurricanes.

Think small town version of Toronto Maple Leafs vs. Montreal Canadiens or New York Yankees vs. Boston Red Sox.

It's a rivalry measured in intensity if not storied past.

The teams meet in the second round of the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League playoffs, the North Conference semifinals, starting tonight in Newmarket.

Game 2 in the best-of-seven goes Sunday at the Stouffville Arena. Both are 7:30 p.m. starts. "It's all about the names on the sweaters," Spirit captain Michael Lombardo said this week. "We just want to get rid of them."

"There's a hated rivalry between our teams. A bunch of us know each other off the ice, but on the ice it's war. Every shift is a new battle and both teams leave each game with bruises and aches."

In the opening round, the third-place Spirit eliminated the Thornhill Major Islanders in six games while the second-plac-

Hurricanes swept the Pickering.

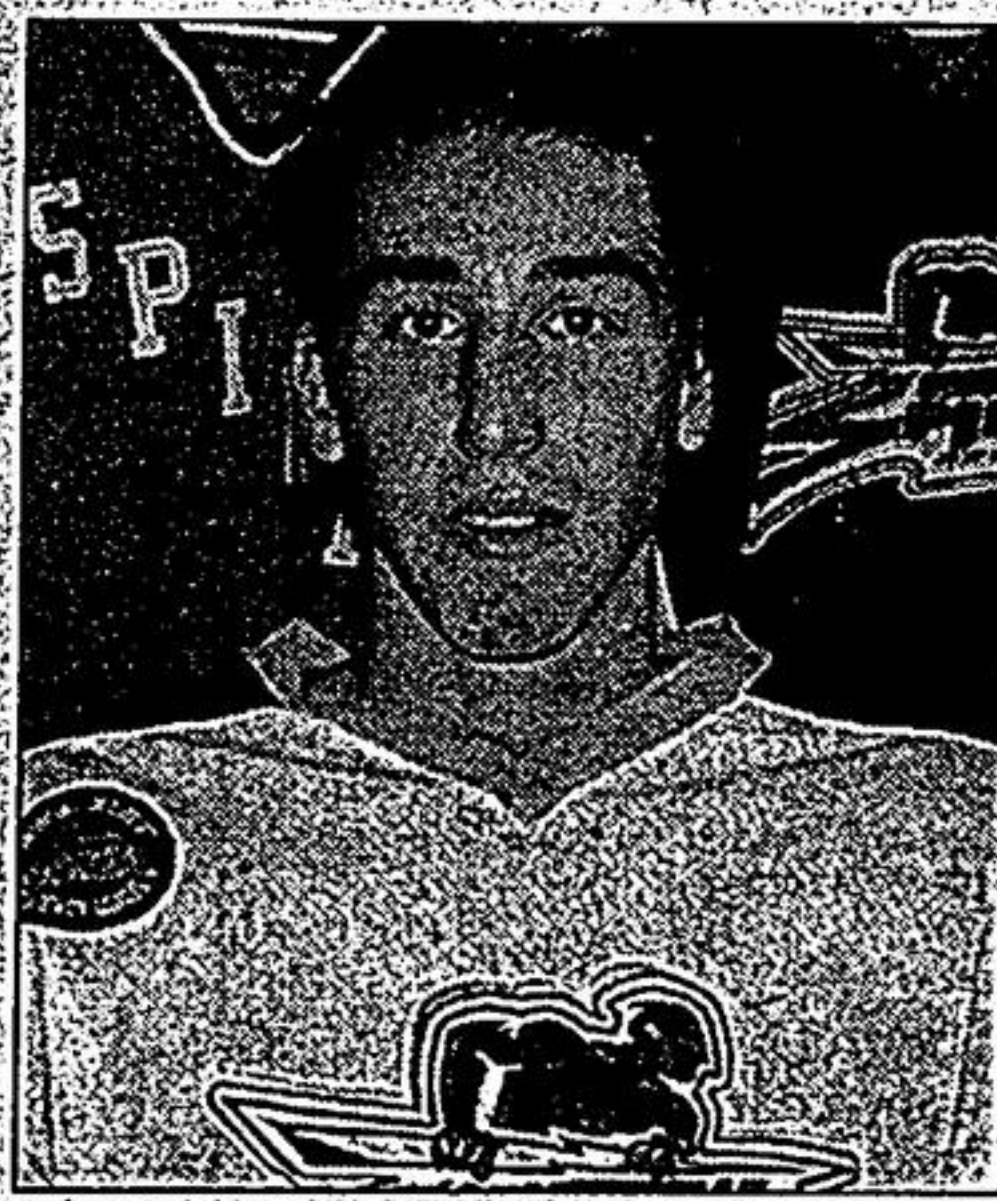
In the regular season series, the Hurricanes won four of six games, played with both Spirit victories coming in Newmarket.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't looking forward to it," Spirit head coach Brian Perrin, the former associate coach and head of player personnel in Newmarket, said. "Newmarket has brought out the best and the worst in us every year. Every game will be a

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A bunch of us know each other off the ice, but on the ice it's war. Every shift is a new battle and both teams leave each game with bruises and aches.

battle. "They have 10 guys back from last year's series and we have six. But we have to find a way to get that warrior attitude we had back this year." The Spirit is 2-0 in its nine-year history in playoff series.



ROB GROOM: Scored game-winning goal in Sunday's sixth game that eliminated Thornhill from first round.

against Newmarket, including last year's seven-game marathon and a memorable six-game upset of the heavily favoured Hurricanes in 2000.

Perrin left Newmarket six years ago for the head job in Stouffville.

Other ingredients in the rivalry include the three Newmarket residents—Mark Mitchell, Randy Johnston and Rick Schrank—on the Spirit roster.

Rob Groom's goal with just over six minutes to play Sunday in Stouffville gave the Spirit a 3-2 win over Thornhill, and the

series.

Grant Buckley and Shane Baxter had staked the Spirit to a 2-0 lead, but pesky Thornhill jumped on a pair of Spirit errors and tied the score in the third.

The Spirit went up 3-2 in the series with a 4-1 win the night before in Thornhill in a game marred by multiple fights and numerous penalties.

Jordan Mabley, Jake Van Allen, Ty Raine and Michael Duco scored for the Spirit.

Rookie goalie Neil Conway was outstanding in both wins.

SPIRITED NOTES: Game 3 in this series goes a week tonight in Newmarket with the fourth game Friday, Feb. 27, in Stouffville. If necessary, Game 5 is Feb. 29 in Newmarket with the sixth game March 1 in Stouffville and the seventh March 2 in Newmarket. The Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association and Markham-Stouffville Girls' Hockey Association moved games to accommodate the Spirit. Players from both associations wearing their team jerseys will be admitted free to the Feb. 27 game.

For more information on the Spirit, log on to: www.stouffvillespirit.com

Atom Clippers sail past Aurora in playoffs

The Stouffville atom Clippers made quick work of Aurora in the third round of their minor hockey playoff series, capturing the first-to-six point series in three straight games.

Powered by goals from Chris Smith, Curtis Crago and Wesley Brown and a solid netminding effort from Kyle Pontone, the Clippers won the first game 3-1.

In the second game, Josh Machesney and Steven Tait scored to propel the Clippers to a 2-1 win.

GIBBS NETS SHUTOUT

In last Wednesday's finale, Travis Gibbs stopped every shot that came his way and Dalton Mayo scored to lift the Clippers to a 1-0 victory.

