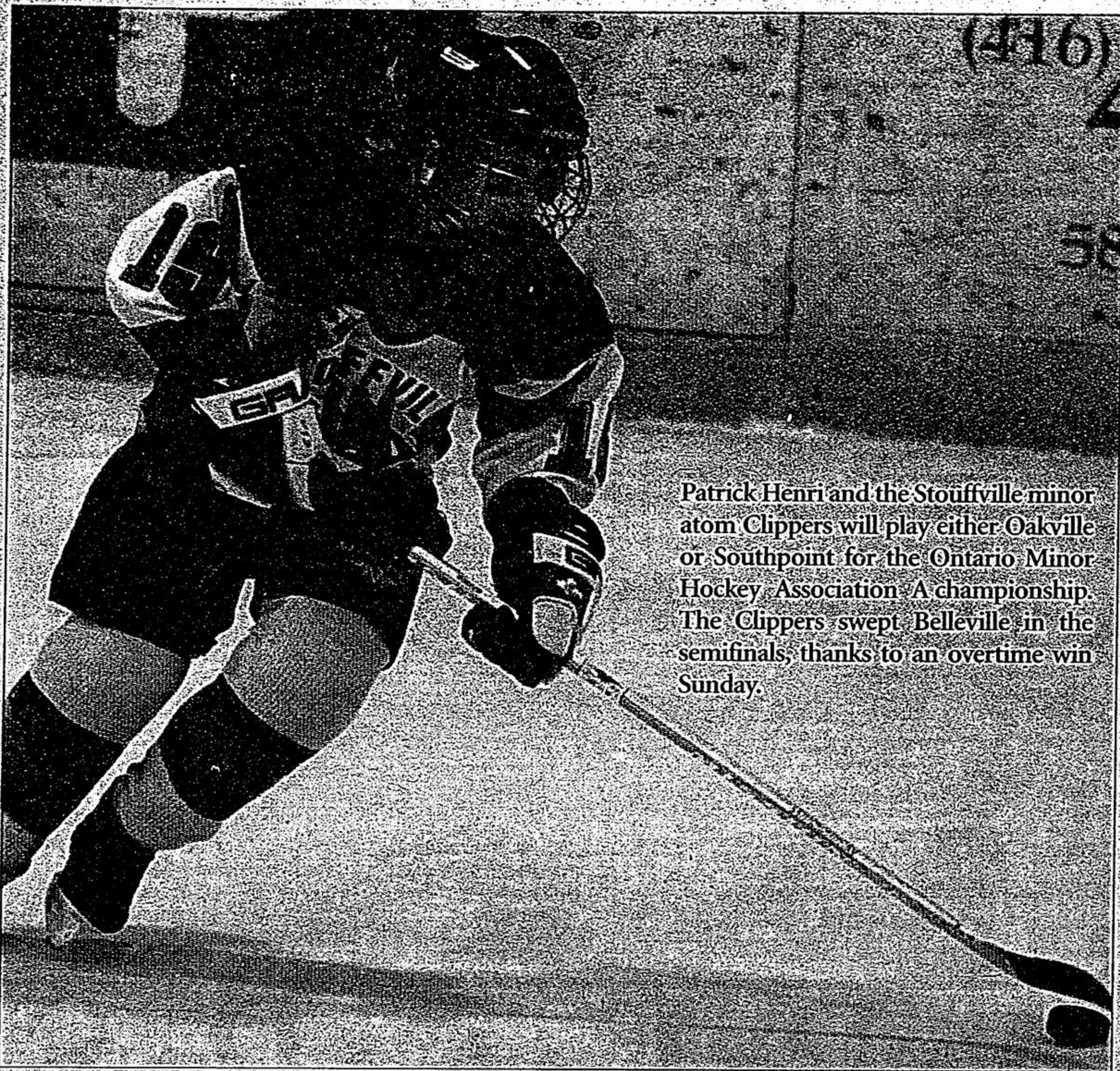


Stouffville Sun-Tribune

SPORTS



Patrick Henri and the Stouffville minor atom Clippers will play either Oakville or Southpoint for the Ontario Minor Hockey Association A championship. The Clippers swept Belleville in the semifinals, thanks to an overtime win Sunday.

Minor atoms sail into OMHA final

The Stouffville Clippers slew a giant on the weekend.

Knock off one more powerhouse and they'll be Ontario Minor Hockey Association A champs.

Josh Burkholder's goal five minutes into overtime Sunday gave the Clippers a 2-1 win over the Belleville Bulls and a 3-0 sweep of their semifinal series.

Before meeting Stouffville, Belleville was undefeated in the playoffs and lost only twice during the regular season.

The Clippers will play the winner of the Oakville Rangers-Southpoint Capitals series in the final. Oakville leads the series 2-0, with the next two games scheduled for Friday and Saturday, if necessary in Southpoint.

"Over the last three years, our team has lost five players to AAA teams one to AA," said Clippers coach Greg Roberts.

"But the guys we have are really stepping it up. They realize they're good players themselves. In the last month, they've come to the rink with a lot of confidence."

Against Belleville, the Clippers won Game 1 at home Feb. 26 then travelled last weekend to historic Belleville Memorial Arena, the second oldest operating rink in the world.

The Clippers dominated Saturday's game, beating the Bulls 4-1 and controlling play for all three periods.

The key was assistant coach Bill English's defence, which shut down the high-octane Belleville team. They averaged 5.6 goals per game before the series, but only scored five times during the three games.

The Clipper defence includes Patrick Henri, Jack English, Jack Porter, Mathew Avoledo and Bobby Lamirande.

Chris Cadaret, Spencer Roberts and Evan Smith had a goal an assist each. Mitchell Smith had the other goal. Jack English and Bobbie Lamirande assisted.

Cameron Nowikow was the winning netminder.

Tight defence and outstanding goaltending from Jack Murray was the difference again Sunday.

Evan Smith gave Stouffville a 1-0 lead before Belleville tied it up on the next shift, setting up Burkholder's overtime heroics.

CLIPPER NOTES: The minor atoms are the only Stouffville team to make the semifinals this year...the juvenile Clippers won the OMHA crown last spring...The minor atoms finished the regular season in first place for the second year in a row and defeated Bradford, East Gwillimbury and Innisfil before meeting Belleville.

Spirit, Aurora in North final

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

One thing the Stouffville Spirit certainly know already is the Aurora Tigers are a beast of a different stripe than the one they slew Tuesday night.

For the moment, however, the Spirit were satisfied to savour their Provincial Jr. A Hockey League North Conference semifinal series victory over the Newmarket Hurricanes, a team that ended their playoff dreams the previous two seasons.

The Spirit earned the ticket into the conference final by upending the Hurricanes 5-3 in Stouffville to claim the series in six games.

"I'm not thinking about (Aurora) now," Spirit head coach Dan West said after his side overcame 2-0 and 3-2 deficits in the decisive game to knock off the Hurricanes by winning four straight games. "We all know the North goes through Aurora. We're just happy to be playing in the North Conference final. We'll have a look at the matchups later."

The contest was likely the best of the series from a fan's standpoint.

"We figured it would be a thriller and a nailbiter and they would come at us," West said. "Every game should have been like tonight. We got some bounces and they got the short end of the stick, but we hit the back of the net a few more times and that's what matters."

The series is scheduled to open Friday night at the Aurora Community Centre. The series shifts Sunday (3:30 p.m.) to Stouffville for Game 2.

For third-year Spirit forward Randy Johnston, the series win was cause for smiles after a two springs of frustration at the hands of Newmarket.

"I can't explain the feeling," said the Newmarket resident, a former Ottawa 67s draft pick and the Spirit's leading scorer in the regular season. "It's been a long time coming."

Down 0-2 in games at one point, Johnston said the Spirit did-

nt waver from the game plan.

"We didn't get too down on ourselves or let it get to us," said Johnston, who drew an assist on Joel Sheppard's controversial winning goal at 3:47 of the third period. "We were hungry for the pucks and tried to win every battle on the ice."

The game-winning goal drew howls of protest from the Canes.

On the play in question, Johnston sent Sheppard in alone after apparently trapping the puck inside the Newmarket blue line. The former Hurricane hoisted a shot beyond the reach of netminder Brad Fogal to break a 3-3 tie with his second goal of the game. Daniel Spivak sealed the outcome with an empty net goal in the final minute.

James McIntosh and Shawn Frank also scored for Stouffville. Ben Plater, Chase Gallagher and Kory Helowka responded for Newmarket.

"Stouffville came in with a total commitment in every game. They had a job to do and did it and good luck to them," Hurricanes head coach Jim Wells said afterwards.

The Aurora Tigers will be shooting for an unprecedented fifth straight North Conference title.

But Tigers head coach Jerome Dupont knows it won't be easy to duplicate a return to the league semifinal round.

"It's going to be a challenging series," said Dupont, who took in Tuesday's Stouffville is a big physical team.

"Stouffville has good depth and is hungry. There wasn't really one team I wanted to play over the other, but I think they are the better team."

The Spirit posted three wins, including an overtime victory, in five games against the Tigers, to stand as the only North Conference team to hold an edge in the season series.

One key factor in the series is the status of Tigers leading scorer Jeric Agosta, who has been sidelined several weeks with a back injury. Dupont hopes to have his ace back at some point.

THE GOODWRENCH PRICE IS THE INSTALLED PRICE

OUR TIRE PRICING IS ALL INCLUSIVE. NO HIDDEN BALANCING OR INSTALLATION COSTS. THE PRICE YOU SEE IS THE PRICE YOU PAY. PLUS IT'S THE TIRE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR VEHICLE.

UNIROYAL MICHELIN BFGoodrich DUNLOP Continental GOODYEAR GENERAL TIRE PIRELLI

TIRES INSTALLED FROM
\$83.95*

Uniroyal Tiger Paw Freedom P195-70R14
Installation, balancing, valve stems, lifetime inspection is included in the price of your tires, and our expertise. We have tires for all your driving needs. Exclusively at GM Dealerships.

GM
Goodwrench Service
Right Tires. Right Price.

THE GM COMMITMENT

*Price per tire. While supplies last. At participating dealers only. Dealers may set individual prices. Offer available for a limited time only to retail customers. Tire disposal extra, if required. Offer not available in Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Dryden, Terrace Bay and Kenora. See Service Advisor for details. Call 1-800-GM-DRIVE or visit goodwrench.gmcanada.com for the store nearest to you.