

# SPORTS

## Spirit down 2-0 to Blades, but not out of series yet

*Work in defensive zone must improve if it hopes to reverse fortunes*

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA  
Staff Writer

Tonight's contest in the Provincial Junior A Hockey League semifinal series between the Stouffville Spirit and Oakville Blades is just the third game in the best-of-seven affair.

But for the Spirit, it is pivotal.

A win by the Spirit would enable it to get back into contention as they trail the series two games to none.

A loss would put them in the unenviable position of having to rally from a three-games-to-none deficit.

Despite being down, the Spirit remain optimistic the series is far from over.

"Absolutely, it's a pivotal game," said Spirit assistant coach Matt Gibson of tonight's game at the Stouffville Arena that starts at 7:30. "We've got to use it to get back in the series. To be down three games to none would be quite the hole. But we feel (Oakville) haven't seen our best yet."

Saturday's game at the Dominion Twin Rinks Arena in Oakville before 850 onlookers was similar to last Thursday's opener to the point where the Spirit played well in spurts. However, it was not enough for an entire game to come out on top as they suffered a



METROLAND PHOTO/LIESA KORTMANN

Stouffville Spirit players Dustin Howard (left) and Jake Van Allen give Oakville Blade Jesse Paul the sandwich treatment during Saturday's Provincial Junior A Hockey League semifinal game in Oakville. The Blades won 2-0 and hold a two-games-to-none lead in the best-of-seven series. The third game is tonight at the Stouffville Arena at 7:30.

6-3 loss.

The Spirit held a 3-1 lead late in the first period on goals by James McIntosh, Joel Sheppard, on a power play, and Mark Sullivan before the Blades got one back from Brandon DeFazio at the 19:15 mark of the period to cut the Stouffville

advantage.

That goal, combined with an untimely Spirit penalty to Simon Gysbers just 14 seconds after DeFazio's goal, seemed to shift momentum in the Blades' favour.

Just 62 seconds into the second period, Mike Beca delivered a

power-play goal to enable the Blades to tie the count at 3-3.

Outshooting the Spirit 21-3 in the period alone and 42-20 in the contest, the Blades took the lead for good on Daniel Calitri's second goal of the game.

Trevor Elliott deposited two

goals in the third period to round out the game scoring.

"You never want to allow a goal late in the period. That goal definitely created a momentum shift and then we took a penalty and that I don't like. That took the wind out of our sails," confirmed Gibson of what transpired late in the first period.

If the Spirit hope to get back to playing the hockey that enabled them to win the North Conference, Gibson feels the club must make a concerted effort to play better in their defensive zone. He noted the Blades are a team that tends to make the most out of what opportunities they are given in the offensive zone.

"We had some breakdowns in our defensive zone. We can't give them (Oakville) that opportunity because they are a team that finishes well. They are a very opportunistic club," he said.

Spirit captain Ian Brunt confirmed the team has strayed from its game plan.

"Oakville is a very talented team. But we didn't play our style, we tried to accommodate to their type of play," he said.

Brunt also feels the break in between last Saturday's game until tonight should enable the Spirit to regroup.

"All we have to do is stick to our game plan and practice hard," he said.

For more on the Spirit, log on to: [www.stouffvillespirit.com](http://www.stouffvillespirit.com)

## Local skaters hope to be in sync in Prague

BY JIM THOMAS  
Correspondent

They're the cream of the crop. Heather Penny, 22, and Bonnie Thompson, 21, both graduates of Stouffville District Secondary School and the Stouffville Figure Skating Club, left Sunday to compete in World Synchronized Figure Skating championships.

The competition, held in Prague, Czechoslovakia, concludes April 2.

Penny skates with the 23-member team NEXXICE out of Burlington-Kitchener/Waterloo.

Thompson is a member of black ice, a team based out of Toronto.

The black ice girls won the Canadian synchronized skating title in Hamilton earlier this month. NEXXICE placed second. Both entries will advance.

For Penny and Thompson, it's their last hurrah in synchro competitive skating.

Penny, a fashion design student attending Art Institute, Toronto, plans to complete her two-year course and go into business. She also hopes to coach.

Thompson, a business diploma



**HEATHER PENNY:** Skates with the 23-member team NEXXICE out of Burlington-Kitchener/Waterloo.

graduate, is studying nursing at Seneca College.

Like Penny, she also plans to teach "little people" on receipt of her skate coach certificate.

Recently, Penny returned from international competition in Milan, Italy. En route home, the team took a side trip to Turin, site of the 2006 Olympics where they were welcomed as conquering heroes.



**BONNIE THOMPSON:** Is a member of the black ice team that skates out of Toronto.

"We had to admit we were not Olympians," Penny said, "but they cheered us just the same."

Competing at the world level isn't new for Thompson. Her team travelled to Gotenberg, Sweden, last year and placed sixth.

Both Penny and Thompson began figure skating at age three, under the coaching of Stouffville's Hans and Judy Ahlgren.

They were like father and

mother to us," Penny said.

Penny started synchronized skating with Markham, joining the NEXXICE team seven years ago.

She credits older sister, Leslie, a former synchro skater, now living in Calgary, with guiding her path. Leslie will accompany Penny to Prague, along with her parents.

Penny feels fortunate to have escaped serious injury, despite the perils of some routines. "Only a few bumps to my head," she notes.

"Never did I dream I'd go this far," she says. "There were times I wanted to give up but support from my parents kept me going. It's been worth it."

Before joining black ice, Thompson was a member of Unionville Elite, a junior competitive team.

In addition to Toronto, some team members come from as far away as Orangeville, Brampton, Ajax and Barrie.

"Last year at Sweden was wonderful," Thompson says, "but this year in Prague will be even better."

She's hoping the team will make it to the podium, "but just being there is a reward in itself."

## Clippers downed in OMHA finale

The Oakville Rangers skated off with the Ontario Minor Hockey Association minor atom A title Sunday after defeating the Stouffville Clippers 3-1 in the deciding game in the best-of-five series at the Stouffville Arena.

Robbie Armstrong scored the lone goal for the Clippers, who played the game before an enthusiastic gathering of over 500 onlookers. Spencer Roberts and Owen Pearce earned assists.

Clippers head coach Greg Roberts felt the Rangers' ability to score early and their persistence were the deciding factors in the contest.

"They scored a couple of early goals and we couldn't respond," said Roberts. "But Oakville is a great team who we took it to physically and they kept coming."

Roberts was quick to praise the efforts of his youthful charges, particularly in reaching the final against a team from a larger population base.

"The kids did awesome getting there and the fact that we lost to a centre like Oakville with its population is a great feat for the small town of Stouffville," he said.