

SPORTS



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

Cindy and Sheila McNeill (left) present Steve Brown with the 2006 Dan McNeill Memorial Trophy. Standing next to Brown is his coach Dave Raymer and Mike Humphreys, Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association president. A former Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association player, Dan died in a car accident in 1992 when he was 19 years old.

Brown's love of the game nets him Dan McNeil award

Steve Brown is a Dan McNeil kind of guy.

Brown was named winner of the Dan McNeil Memorial Trophy by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association last Thursday.

A graduate of the association, Dan died in a car accident near Goodwood when he was 19 years of age in 1992.

Brown played all his minor hockey in Stouffville just like

McNeil.

He was a late cut last fall from the Uxbridge Bruins Jr. C team McNeil was playing for at the time of his death.

"I love the game and I love to be a part of a team," said Brown, who will graduate from Stouffville District Secondary School next month.

"And I love winning."

He was a member of the Stouffville peewee Clippers

team that won the 2002 Ontario Hockey Federation championship in Stouffville.

Undecided on his hockey future, he hopes to begin an apprenticeship in cabinetmaking this year.

"It's good to see the cream of the crop, the good kids in town recognized," said Cindy McNeil, Dan's sister, who attended the presentation with her mother, Sheila.

Del Zotto confirms he'll go OHL route

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident expected to go high in Saturday's draft

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Minor hockey prospects eligible for Saturday's Ontario Hockey League priority selection might be singing a paraphrased tune by The Clash.

With apologies to Joe Strummer: Should I stay and play hockey locally for a couple of more years?

Or should I go and play in the OHL? Michael Del Zotto, Steven Stamkos and Cody Hodgson are at that hockey crossroads.

Playing in the Markham Waxers minor organization, Del Zotto and Stamkos for the OHL Cup champion minor midgets and Hodgson with the OMHA champion midgets, they're considered among the elite of this year's draft class.

OHL scouts say all three could be chosen within the first few picks of the opening round that begins at 9 a.m. The Sarnia Sting has first pick, followed by the Oshawa Generals, Mississauga Ice Dogs and Erie Otters.

It's not often that three players from one organization were ranked so highly.

But the thought had crossed the minds of Del Zotto, a 15-year-old Whitchurch-Stouffville resident who plays defence, and Stamkos, a 15-year-old forward who lives in Markham.

'We've talked a lot about going one and two in the draft. This can be a life changing decision.'

"I work out with Steve a lot and we're like best friends," Del Zotto said. "We've talked a lot about going one and two in the draft. This can be a life changing decision."

While Stamkos is still undecided on what route he will take, Del Zotto will pursue the OHL route.

"I'm a bit nervous," Del Zotto, a Grade 10 St. Andrew's College student, conceded. "But I'm mostly excited. I'm looking forward to it. It's a big moment in my life."

The decision to go the OHL route took him the entire season. But after weighing various factors including distance from home, the style of his game, waiting two years before going to university and the reputation the OHL has in developing pro prospects, Del Zotto felt the OHL was best.

"I definitely wanted to make sure it was the right choice," he said.

Speaking on behalf of his son, Chris Hodgson said Cody will be staying in Markham for the next two years as he's seriously looking at the United States collegiate scholarship route. The deci-



MICHAEL DEL ZOTTO: Took several factors into consideration before deciding he would go the OHL route.

sion to go in this direction, wasn't that difficult, Chris said.

"We've been visiting several universities and we're pretty excited with that. We've had four offers so far," Chris said.

While attending Unionville High School for the next two years, Cody will play for the Waxers junior A squad.

"He's still young and we want to keep him around for the next couple of years. When he gets into Grade 12 he can do what he wants," Chris cited.

What Del Zotto, Stamkos and Hodgson had accomplished this season was something that might only happen once in a lifetime in Markham, said Bill Jefferson, Waxers AAA president. He's pleased with the manner in which they've represented the organization.

"It's something that a lot of kids never get to see. It's great for our organization and it's unbelievable."

"These kids are out of this world, they're all well-mannered and they're great players," he said.

Paul Titanic, Waxers minor midget coach this past year and coach of all three players two seasons ago, when they were major bantams and silver medalists at the Ontario Hockey Federation championships, couldn't be happier.

"These are young men who are extremely talented. As a coach the thing I feel good about is that I've allowed their talents to be demonstrated, allowing talented players to use their skills. These young men are highly regarded," he said.

In coaching Del Zotto and Stamkos this past season, Titanic was especially pleased with the manner in which they carried themselves out with the rest of their teammates. In no way was any mention of the OHL draft brought up, he said.

"Our guys were really good about not talking of the draft and not making it a focus. Internally, they were driven to do well. They didn't expose their feelings to the rest of the team. Any concept of the draft wasn't a part of their development."

To follow the OHL draft live, log on to www.ontariohockeyleague.com

It's 'game on' for local youth ball hockey tournament

Boyd's Sports pad to host inaugural competition Saturday

BY JIM THOMAS
Correspondent

Whitchurch-Stouffville's inaugural road hockey tournament is set for Saturday at the Boyd's Source for Sports Buttermakers Pad.

The event, part of the town's Youth Week, includes a series of activities sponsored by the Mayor's Youth Council under the presidency of Mackenzie Gott.

The round-robin tournament, open to boys and girls 12

to 18 years, will begin at 9 a.m. and conclude around noon. In case of ties, winners will be declared by shoot outs.

Sign-ups will be accepted until Saturday morning.

Max Muir, 14, is the tournament organizer. Leslie Wilkinson is a facilitator.

"The kids are really excited," Wilkinson said. "No one will be restricted."

At the same time there's a desire for balance so no team will feel incapable of competing, Wilkinson explained.

"The young people have taken ownership of the tournament," Wilkinson said. "We want them to feel a sense of pride in a job well done."

"Winning is secondary," said Wilkinson. "Having fun is most important."

Wilkinson praised the work of both Gott and Muir.

"Mackenzie has been fabulous, largely the reason why the youth council has been successful," she noted.

"She (Gott) is totally dedicated to making a difference in town," said Wilkinson. "She understands what being a good citizen of Whitchurch-Stouffville is all about."

Muir worked hard getting the tournament off the ground, she said.

The youth council hope to make this competition an annual event.