

# Can Spartans three-peat as Ontario champs?

*Incoming Grade 9 talent has Stouffville Secondary coach optimistic*

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA  
Staff Writer

Brian Shankman refuses to be lured into saying his Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans girls' varsity hockey team can three-peat as Ontario high school A/AA champions.

But the Spartans' head coach thinks the make-up of this year's team will make it competitive enough to challenge for the York Region title. And after that, who knows?

This despite losing top scorer Hayley Hughes, who is now attending Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y.

The Spartans opened their York Region season Tuesday by defeating visiting Cardinal Carter Catholic High (Aurora) 4-1.

"I think our team looks really good," Shankman said. "I'm happy with it."

What intrigues Shankman foremost, he said, is the infusion of five Grade 9 players.

Included in that group are forwards Elise Acton, daughter of Toronto Maple

*'We won't be sneaking up on anybody. We've got to bring our game each time out.'*

As a result, he said his charges must be ready to answer the bell for each game.

"We won't be sneaking up on anybody. We've got to bring our game each time out," he said.

Scoring for the Spartans in Tuesday's win were Acton with two goals, Spataro

and Barber with one apiece. Heather Hughes collected two assists.

The Spartans are scheduled resume their league schedule Dec. 5 at Keswick Secondary.

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Leafs' assistant coach Keith Acton, Vanessa Spataro and Suzanne Dickie, along with defencemen Lindsay Burrows and Emily O'Shaughnessy.

This is a nice group of Grade 9s that feeds the engine," Shankman said in describing the cast that has blended in well into the 13-player roster.

While the rookies have asserted themselves, Shankman said his returnees have improved over last year.

Leading the returning group are captain Jaimie Sparks, Lauren Barber and Karli Ziegler. All three forwards are in Grade 12. Also in the mix are Grade 11 forwards Heather Hughes and Brittany Crago.

The defence will be anchored by Grade 10 students Dayle Wilkinson and Brittany Drew.

Wilkinson is a vital cog to the Spartans' defence, Shankman said.

*'We definitely have more balanced scoring this year. We can get scoring from all three of our lines.'*

"She's an elite player who plays well at both ends of the rink. Dale rarely gets beat one on one and she's a smart player," he said.

The Spartans' goaltending situation is also ably manned by Grade 10 returnee Courtney Humphreys and Felicia Penanen, another Grade 10 student in her first year with the team.

What also has Shankman and first-year assistant coach Sarah Fitzgerald singing an optimistic tune is the presence of a balanced offensive attack.

This, he said, should be one of the club's strengths as last season, the club had a tendency to rely heavily on Hayley Hughes to score.

"We definitely have more balanced scoring this year," Shankman said. "We can get scoring from all three of our lines."

Shankman acknowledged opposing clubs will be digging deeper to try and defeat the defending champions.

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