

O'Neill saving the day for Spirit

Goaltender enjoying best year of Jr. A hockey career

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

There have been moments during the Provincial Hockey League Junior A season when Stouffville Spirit general manager Tom Milne wondered where the team would be without goalkeeper Trevor O'Neill.

On several occasions, the 19-year-old Keswick resident has provided the difference in the Spirit skating off with two points rather than empty handed.

O'Neill has recorded 22 wins in 35 appearances and sports a goals against average of 2.97 and a .901 save percentage.

He also has a league-best six shutouts.

'GOALIES DON'T FALL OUT OF TREES'

"Goalies don't fall out of trees," Milne said. "This is definitely Trevor's best year since he's been in the league. He's definitely been huge for us and he's won a few games for us single-handedly."

Entering his fourth season in the league, O'Neill is the first to acknowledge he's having a productive campaign.

It's his best since he entered the league as a rookie with the Markham Waxers and posted four shutouts.

But after spending an additional season with the Waxers in which he failed to record a shutout, O'Neill had a falling out with the team and was dealt to the Spirit for cash.

"I wasn't prepared to go back to Markham for a third year," he said. "I



TREVOR O'NEILL: Stouffville Spirit goalie leads 36-team Provincial Jr. A Hockey League with six shutouts.

definitely like it here (in Stouffville) a lot more. The guys on the team we have a great and it was a lot easier for me to improve here. It was a great fit.

"I was definitely hoping to get more than four shutouts this year," he said. "It's been a good accomplishment."

"I definitely worked harder in practice than in previous years," he said.

Being reunited with Darryl Sauro, a Stouffville resident who coached him in Markham and is the Spirit's goalie coach, has been key.

"Darryl's been there behind me all the way," O'Neill said. "He's given me pointers as to what I've done right or wrong. He's my eye in the sky."

Along with Sauro's presence, O'Neill said just being a league veteran has enabled him to become more familiar with what must be done to get the job done.

"I think I've matured through being in the league four years. I now know what to expect," he said.

Milne, whose son Matt is a goalkeeper with the arch-rival Newmarket Hurricanes, thinks O'Neill's cool has been a positive attribute.

"Trevor doesn't get flustered when the opposition scores and he always has the same demeanor. He has a good, calming influence."

"He stops the first shot and that's all you can ask. And he's a good team guy," Milne said.

Playing for a team with plenty of offensive firepower gives him a boost of confidence.

"We've got guys who can definitely score and that's reassuring. It definitely helps your confidence knowing they can get four or five goals a game," he said.

ASTHMA LED TO JOB IN NET

Introduced to the game as a forward at age four, he turned to the nets when diagnosed with asthma two years later.

O'Neill could return for another season with the Spirit if he wishes, but hopes to be on a scholarship in the United States or playing at a Canadian university.

For now, though, O'Neill's attention is focused on helping the Spirit go as far as possible in the playoffs.

Go to stouffvillespirit.com for more on the Spirit.

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