

They're No. 1: defending champs slotted in as top teams

Long layoff could hurt SDSS, 19 teams chasing them at provincials in Ottawa

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

When the Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans senior boys' hockey team hits the ice in Ottawa for the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations A/AA playdowns April 2 to 5, they will have 19 other entries taking close aim at them.

Not just because they are the defending gold medallists, but because they are ranked No. 1 in this year's provincial tournament.

While veteran Spartans head coach Jamie Hewitt won't turn down that honour, he was quick to note the seeding given to his York Region Athletic Association championship team is just a number.

"The seedings are just for the beginning of the tournament. You've still got to go out and play the games," he said.

For the Spartans, being the top seed isn't new. Five years ago, they were also the top seed when the tournament was played in London. That season though, the Spartans were eliminated in the quarter-finals.

That year, the Spartans missed several players who elected to play for their rep teams in the playoffs instead for the school.

Entering this year's championship though, Hewitt said he will only be missing Dennis O'Shaughnessy for at least the first part of the tournament.

The forward plays for the Vaughan Kings that won the GTHL midget title Wednesday. The Kings advance to this week's Ontario championships, which are also in Ottawa.

The Spartans will begin pool play April 2 at 8 a.m. against 16th seeded Marc Garneau (Ottawa) and then play at 2:30 p.m. against 11th seeded Father Redmond (Toronto).

The following day, the Spartans will



JAMIE HEWITT: Stouffville boys coach remembers being top seed at provincials five years ago.

play 20th seed Forest Hill Collegiate (Toronto) at 2:15 p.m. and finish off against sixth seed Holy Trinity (Courtice) at 8:15 p.m.

As the top seed, Hewitt acknowledged they won't have the luxury of sneaking up on any team.

"We just have to play our game and stick to our systems and be disciplined in doing so. That's what we have to focus on," he said.

What concerns Hewitt, and probably most of the other entries, will be the long layoff as most of the regional championships were staged prior to March break.

For the Spartans, their last game with any meaning took place Feb. 28 when they defeated Brother Andre Catholic High School or Markham for the regional title.

Because of this, he feels the team that can shake off the rust the quickest might stand a good chance to be in the hunt for this year's coveted gold medal.

Last chance at A/AA trophy for back-to-back girls champs

Stouffville District's girls team is in the same boat.

They, too, are ranked No. 1 in their provincial tournament.

The two-time defending OFSAA A/AA gold medallists will enter the playdowns, which runs from April 2 to 4, as the No. 1 seed.

Earning that lofty status last year paid off for the Spartans as they skated off with the coveted OFSAA title after defeating Bishop Tonnos Catholic High School (Ancaster) 5-1 in the final in Trenton.

'It would be nice to win it this year, to finish off this portion of our existence and move into the next'

Dan McConnachie
Spartans assistant coach

The Spartans will begin play Wednesday at 8 a.m. against the 20th-seeded North Grenville (Kemptonville) Knights. At 12:40 p.m. they will meet the 11th seed Roland Michener (South Porcupine) Predators. The Spartans will conclude

► Go to ofsaa.on.ca for more information on the championships

pool play April 3 at 10:20 a.m. against 10th seed Ridley College (St. Catharines).

Upon conclusion of pool play, all of the advancing teams will be reseeded.

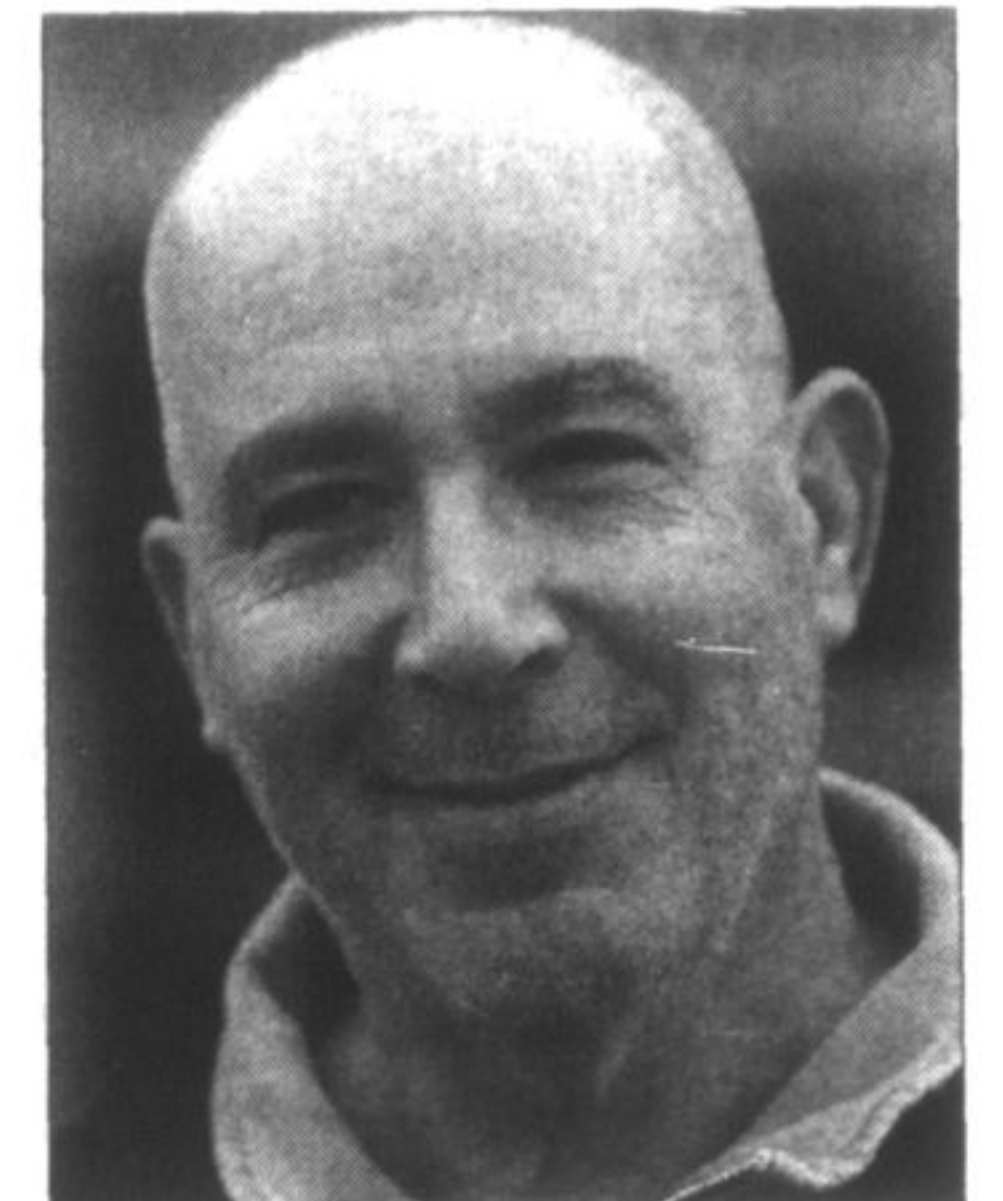
While being named as the top seed this year is a nice gesture, Spartans assistant coach Dan McConnachie acknowledged it will present a challenge to this year's club.

"It definitely puts a target on our backs," McConnachie said of their seeding. "Everyone will be out to unseed us. We've won OFSAA two years in a row and last year we were ranked No. 1. It's not a bad thing. But that's the way it's perceived."

Brian Shankman is head coach of the Spartans.

If the Spartans hope to skate off with their third straight title, McConnachie said they will have to do the things that carried them to a successful year in which they finished first in the regular season and were York Region finalists.

"We've got to get timely scoring and goaltending and it all has to come together at once or



BRIAN SHANKMAN: SDSS girls hockey coach's team opens Ontario finals in Pembroke Wednesday.

we'll be in trouble," he said.

While aiming for a three-peat is one incentive the club has going for them, McConnachie also noted this year will mark the final year they will be competing at the A/AA level.

With the school's student population expanding, he said they will be moving up next year to the AAA level.

"It would be nice to win it this year, to finish off this portion of our existence and move into the next," he said.

— Mike Hayakawa

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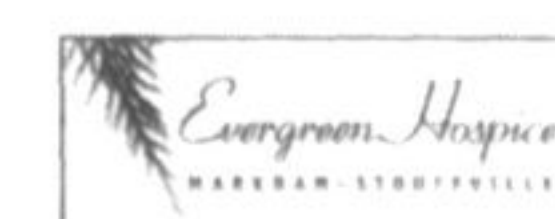
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