

OHA's meetings could be pivotal in Jr. A clash

Perhaps wheels are turning inside the inner sanctum, but it sure appears on the outside that the Ontario Provincial Jr. A Hockey League governors are in no great hurry to figure out the future of their league.

A pilot project which in the immediate future will re-shape the division alignments, and possibly alter the face of junior hockey in the province in the longer haul, seems to be a foregone conclusion while the league masterminds attach their hopes to legal threats to make the project go away.

STOUFFVILLE PART OF PILOT PROJECT

At best, doubt lingers about moving and shaking since many of the league's elite movers and shakers appear to be aligned in a small group of owners. They are involved in the project that will see eight to 10 teams operate within their own division, emerging when they have determined a winner to join the other OPJHL division champions.

In addition to the Newmarket Hurricanes and St. Michael's Buzzers, leaders of the pilot project, the test is to include the Hamilton Red Wings, Toronto Jr. Canadiens, Stouffville Spirit, Markham Waxers, Wellington Dukes



John Cudmore

Cuddy Shark

and Cobourg Cougars. One or two more teams may be added to the picture before the ice chips settle.

With a little more than three months until the start of the 2008-09 season it still remains to be seen how the league is to shape up, or realign, if you will. Certainly three months is time enough to get affairs in order.

However, keep in mind it was April 19 when the idea of a pilot project was introduced to the Ontario Hockey Association.

And still there has been little evidence the league is moving to stop the pilot project

other than the occasional peep about legal action.

You wouldn't know it by the pace at which the league guys are moving that some of these teams may be fighting for their survival at the Junior A level. A turning point to the situation could come this weekend when the association's annual general meeting takes place in Kingston.

"We should have a clear idea after that how this will unfold," said association president Brent Ladds.

"The thing is, we're trying to bring people together, not drive them apart."

One thing is certain, and that is there does seem to exist a reasonable degree of mistrust, particularly from the league group which, depending on your source, seems suspicious not all is as it is portrayed by representatives of the group of teams seeking to form the pilot project division.

League chairperson Tom Baker, also president of the Streetsville Derbys, said a recommendation has been formulated to "deal with issues that have arisen with the OHA" but, as of Tuesday, had not been presented to the league's board of governors.

"The concept the splinter group guys have

been telling everyone is false," he said. "They won't be a super league or have super powers where only the elite can play. That has been the message being delivered by the splinter group from reports I've had from people I trust."

"It's confusing to hockey people and creating a problem."

That seems kinda from out of left field for an official statement. Never mind the so-called splinter group is essentially to operate as a division within the league and is not violating league or association charters.

FEW WEEKS OF OFF-SEASON LEFT

Truly confusing is the pace at which the league, if it is so intent on grounding the pilot, is moving.

The association, as a group of 36 owners with widely varying situations and interests, has, at the best of times in the past, had difficulty deciding on the simplest of issues.

So, why in the name of Peter Puck would one expect this most important issue to be any different?

Figuring out its future in a few weeks during the off-season, well, that seems to be asking a lot.

McIntosh at cottage on NHL draft day

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

Hockey Night In Canada analyst Don Cherry often warns potential prospects who aren't ranked highly entering the National Hockey League amateur entry draft to remain at home.

Avoid the disappointment of going especially when your name isn't called out when you think it might, the hockey icon would suggest.

When this year's lottery takes place next weekend in Ottawa, former Stouffville Spirit forward James McIntosh intends to adhere to Cherry's words of wisdom.

RANKED BY SCOUTS

This despite the NHL's Central Scouting Bureau had the 19-year-old, six-foot, one-inch, 177-pound Holland Landing resident ranked 162nd among North American prospects.

"I've had some people say I should go and some say that I shouldn't," McIntosh said. "I'm not putting too much emphasis on the draft and I'm not expecting it (to be drafted) to happen. But I'm excited and I hope things will work out."

While McIntosh is leaning on avoiding the trip to Ottawa he intends to go away that weekend. To his cottage on Lake Muskoka where he will do a little fishing and play some golf.

Regardless of what his fate holds at the draft, McIntosh had plenty of good reason to be satisfied with how he concluded his final year with the Spirit.

During the regular season he was the club's third-leading scorer with 28 goals and 36 assists in 44 Provincial Jr.

A Hockey League regular season games.

During the postseason he had 10 goals and five assists in 15 contests.

In addition to posting those numbers, he was chosen to play for the Canada East team at the World Junior A Challenge in British Columbia that won the silver medal.

He also took part in the Canadian Junior Hockey League's Prospect Game in Winkler, Man.

McIntosh's accomplishments this past season also earned him a trip last week to the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto where he was one of six players (one goal-keeper, two defencemen and three forwards) named to the Ontario Hockey Association's Top Prospects Team.

During the ceremonies, Spirit teammate Corey Trivino, who was rated as the 49th top North American prospect by the Central Scouting Bureau, received the B.J. Monro Memorial Trophy for being the top OHA prospect.

OHA PROSPECT PRIZE

"It was a surprise," McIntosh said of his selection. "But it was a nice honour and I had a great time at the Hockey Hall of Fame."

While McIntosh hopes to have some NHL team call to inform him of some good tidings, he knows it's not his main priority.

Taking precedence will be school as he will launch his collegiate career at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio after earning a scholarship to the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division One school earlier this year.

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