

Spirit streaking into new year

The Stouffville Spirit accomplished something Tuesday they had not done all season long.

The Central Canadian Hockey League club recorded its third straight victory of the season, a 4-3 verdict against the Hamilton Red Wings during the Newmarket Showcase Tournament at the Ray Twinney Complex.

With the regular season in the stretch run, the Spirit bolstered their record to 16 wins, one overtime win, three shootout wins against 16 losses and one shootout loss for 41 points, good for fourth place in the East Division.

"It's been a funny year where we'd win two games, lose one, win another two and lose one," said first-year Spirit head coach Craig Donovan. "It's nice for us to be on this (winning streak) because we have some tough games coming up against Wellington, Lindsay and Markham. That'll be a tough test for us."

All three triumphs were by one-goal.

"If we can win one-goal games that will help us when the playoffs roll around because games tend to be more tight," he said. "But it doesn't matter if we win 1-0 or 5-1. I'll take the two points no matter how we get them."

Trailing 1-0 in the first period, the Spirit rallied to tie the game entering the second

period on a goal by recently acquired forward Kyle McLaughlin.

The Spirit gained the upper hand in the second period when McLaughlin netted his second goal of the game on a power play and David Milne added one with just 22 seconds remaining in the frame.

After the Red Wings scored early in the third period to cut the Spirit's lead to 3-2, rookie defenceman Ryan Zupancic scored to restore Stouffville's two-goal advantage.

The Red Wings added one more goal, but could get no closer.

The Spirit outshot the Red Wings 32-27.

McLaughlin came to the Spirit from the Aurora Tigers in a three-way trade that sent former team captain Jordan Forfar to the Huntsville Otters in early December.

"He's been a great addition for us," Donovan said. "He's a player that needed a chance to play. He's had a couple of points a game for us and he's been helpful in winning key faceoffs for us. He can also skate, he has a great attitude and he fits in well."

The Spirit resumes league play against the Lindsay Muskies at the Stouffville Arena on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

—Michael Hayakawa

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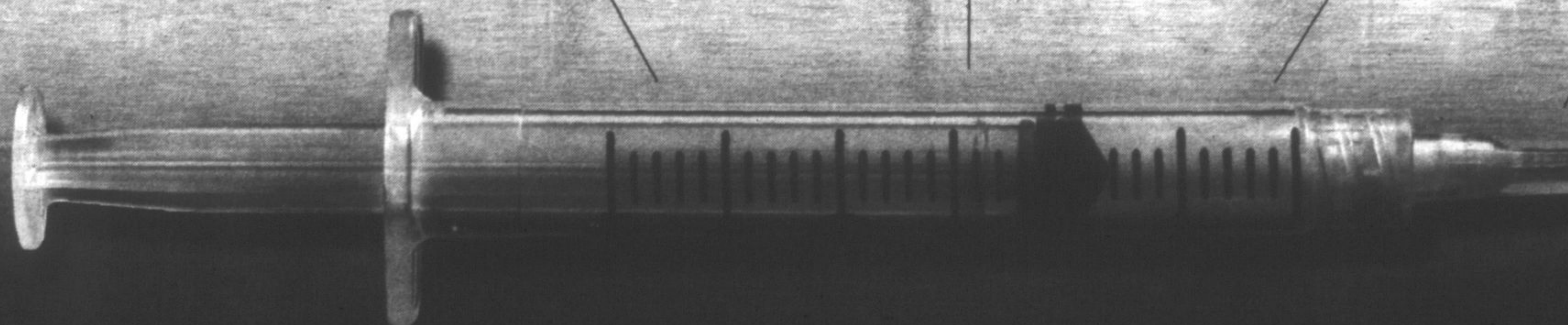
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