

SPORTS: Stouffville pro prospects meet in OHL playoffs

Leafs Carrick's first choice

BY JIM MASON
jmason@yrmg.com

KINGSTON – Even their names rhyme. Sam Carrick and Ethan Werek are on opposite sides in Ontario Hockey League playoffs, but they have a lot in common.

Both Stouffville-area residents got their first taste of the game in the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association. They played on the youngest of Clipper A-level rep teams as six-year-olds before advancing through the AAA ranks, the highest level of minor hockey in North America. Both played in the Greater Toronto Hockey League.

SECOND-HALF IMPROVEMENT

Born one year apart, they were first-round draft picks of OHL teams, Werek to the Kingston Frontenacs in 2007 and Carrick to the Brampton Battalion a year later. The teams are meeting in a first-round playoff series.

A difference? Werek was selected in last year's NHL draft, in the second round by the New York Rangers.

Carrick, 18, is projected as a third or fourth-round pick in this year's draft in Los Angeles this June

"There's no doubt Sam will be drafted," said Brampton head coach and director of hockey operations Stan Butler after his team's 4-2 win here Friday. "It's just a matter of when and his playoffs will determine that."

"He had a very good second half to the season and that's very important in your draft year."

He finished with 42 points in 66 games, second highest on the Battalion.

Carrick has talked to veteran teammates Cody Hodgson (Vancouver) and Matt Clark (Anaheim)

about playing through one's draft year.

"I try to keep it out of my mind and concentrate on each game, but it's always there," Carrick said. "Clark said you can't think about it or you'll screw up. 'Work hard, play your game' was his advice."

He hopes that hard work parlays itself into an invite to the NHL's pre-draft combine.

Favourite team?

"I grew up a Leaf fan, so to be picked by them would be a dream come true," said Carrick, who starred for Stouffville Secondary. "Calgary is my second favourite."

On Friday night here, he had an assist, came close to a goal of his own and played on the top power-play unit with Hodgson, last year's national player of the year. His parents, Jane and John Carrick, were in the stands at the spectacular K-Rock Centre.

He got a goal Sunday and was a plus-2 as Brampton opened a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven.

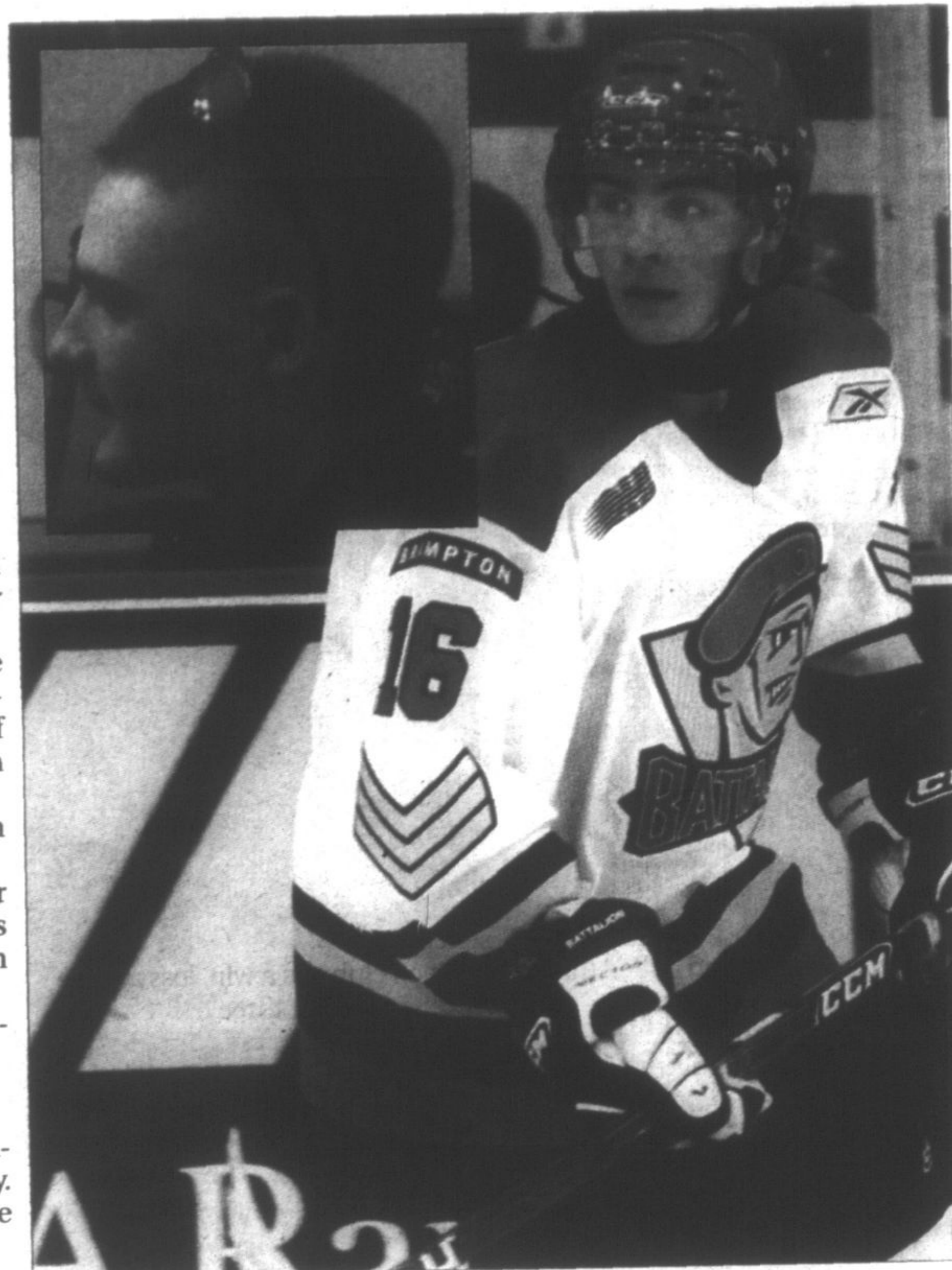
Carrick will need at least one trip to the barber before draft day. The Battalion players took the scissors into their own hands in a bout of post-season team bonding.

Like many of his teammates, Carrick has a combination mullet and pony tail.

FOUR BROTHERS IN OHL OR AAA

The Carrick clan is the Stouffville version of the Stals, with four sons playing high-level amateur hockey. Sam's older brother Jake is also in the OHL, with the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds.

Younger brother Trevor is in his OHL draft year with the Markham Majors AAA minor midgets. Youngest brother Josh also plays at the AAA level, with the Toronto Red Wings minor bantams.



Stouffville's Sam Carrick in action with the Brampton Battalion of the Ontario Hockey League and (inset) with his customized playoff haircut.

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