

SPORTS: Stouffville Secondary teams open pre-season Wednesday

Winless in Britain, but trip no waste

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The Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans rugby team failed to win a game during its 12-day March break tour of England and Wales.

But the lessons learned from that expedition are expected to elevate the team's performance once the York Region Athletic Association campaign kicks off, predicted Spartans head coach Jamie Hewitt.

"Our kids played well," the veteran Spartans head coach said of his 33-player contingent. "We learned a lot about (rugby) systems play and we saw some players who jumped up during the tour and will probably start for us once our (YRAA) season starts."

The Spartans played friendlies against St. John's School in London, Kingsmead in Somerset,

England, Millfield in Street, England and Brecon in Wales.

Noting the rugby teams in England and Wales are winding down their seasons while the Spartans are just gearing up for their outdoor campaign, Hewitt said his club's best outing was against Millfield.

With Millfield fielding one of the top athletic schools in Great Britain, the Spartans played them close before falling 29-14.

"The trip was fantastic. Not just in the kids' level of play, but their behaviour was something the coaching staff and school should be proud of," he said.

The Spartan senior, junior and bantam rugby teams will play their first exhibition games of the high school season at Pineridge (Pickering) April 7 starting at 3:30 p.m.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Mac Colasimone (left) gets set to receive the ball with teammate John Colley behind him as the Grade 9 students practise at the Stouffville District Secondary School parking lot on Tuesday.

Spirit grad scores trip to NCAA Frozen Four

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Daniel Spivak's scoring statistics reveal he has no goals nor any assists in 31 games played this season with the Rochester Institute of Technology Tigers men's hockey team.

But the 21-year-old former Stouffville Spirit junior A defenceman and Thornhill native isn't the least bit concerned about his lack of production at the offensive end of the ice.

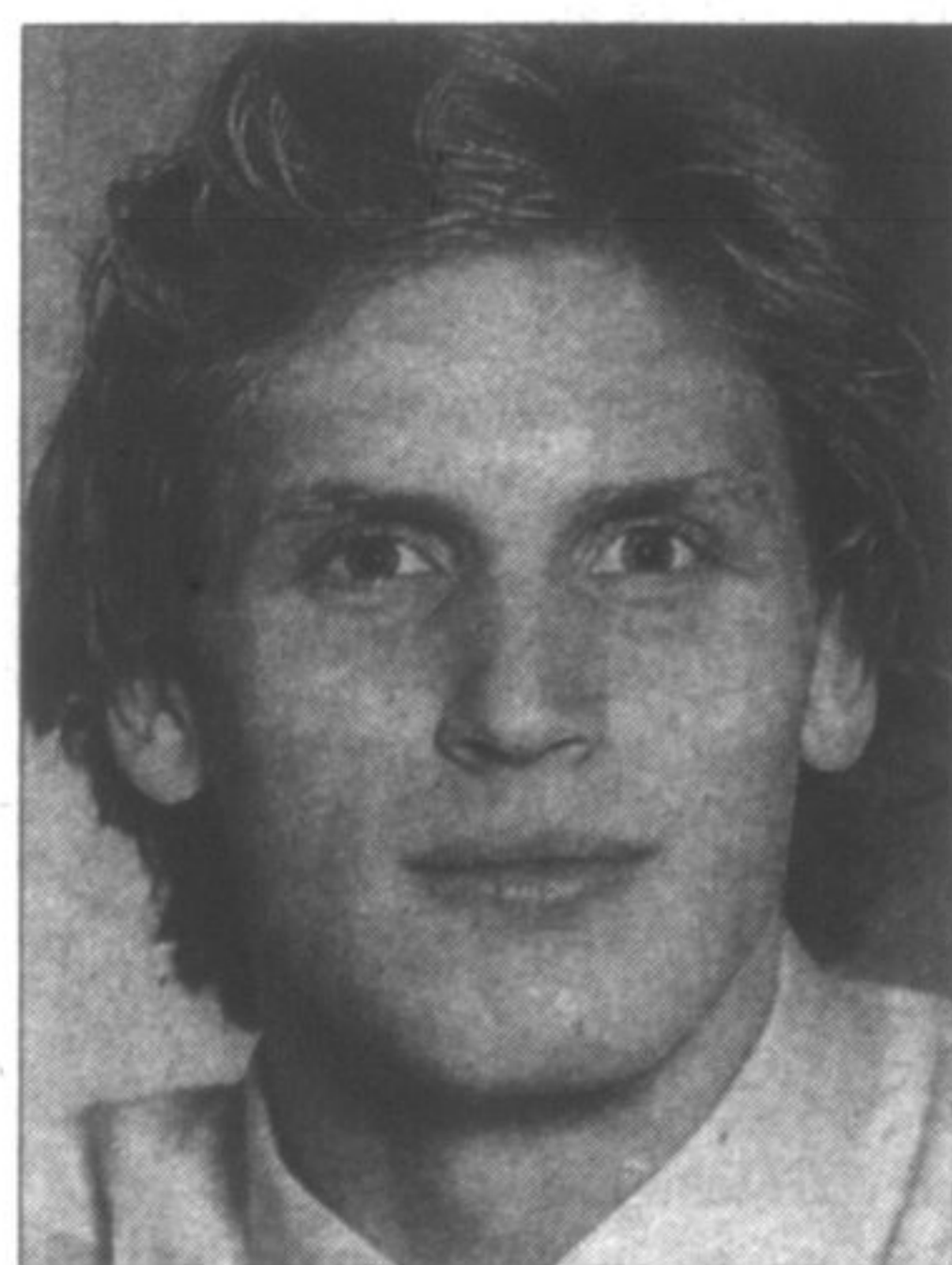
Nor is the Tigers' coaching staff or any followers of their hockey program.

Especially since Spivak and the rest of his teammates at the Rochester, N.Y.-based school will make their first-ever appearance in the coveted National Collegiate Athletic Association Frozen Four championships.

Capturing their Atlantic Hockey Conference title for just the first time in the five years since competing at the NCAA Division One level, the Tigers won last weekend's NCAA East Regional in Albany, N.Y. where they defeated the University of Denver 2-1 in their semifinal tilt and the University of New Hampshire 6-2 in last Saturday's final.

In claiming the East Region title, the Tigers will face the University of Wisconsin in one semifinal at Detroit's Ford Field April 8 at 5 p.m. The winner of that tilt will face the other semifinal victor featuring Boston College and the University of Miami (Ohio).

"It certainly hasn't been an offensively productive year for me," said Spivak, a sec-



DANIEL SPIVAK: Rochester defenceman played four seasons with Stouffville Spirit.

ond-year business and finance major. "But I've settled in and found my role at the back end in preventing opposing players from putting up points."

A four-year member of the Spirit from the 2004-05 season through 2007-08, Spivak's role has certainly been instrumental in what success the Tigers have attained thus far in their Cinderella-like campaign.

Reflecting on the club's ascent up the NCAA Division One ranks, Spivak said it's been a case of the team meshing together at the right time with each player executing

their defined responsibilities to near perfection.

"Each person knows their specific role and is executing it well," he said.

While elated with what the team has accomplished to date, Spivak was quick to concede reaching the Frozen Four wasn't exactly their immediate goal at the start of the season.

Rather, it was a case of taking baby steps.

"You start by attaining other goals at the start like winning the league title first which the team had never done before, then you set the bar higher," he explained. "So far it's been great."

Upon returning from Albany after winning the regionals, Spivak said the entire RIT campus has been caught up in the euphoria surrounding the club's recent feat.

"Once we got off the bus there were lots of people cheering us. I've only seen this in the movies," he said.

With the team riding a 12-game winning streak in preparation for the school's first-ever Frozen Four appearance, Spivak insists there's no added pressure placed on them. In fact, he said this will continue to work in their favour.

And it suits him and the rest of his teammates just fine.

"Our team has been an underdog from the start of the year. We weren't expected to win (the East Region) let alone come out of the top 16," he said. "When they bracketed the teams for the NCAA tournament there was

plenty of talk about teams like the University of Michigan and the University of Wisconsin and even the University of Denver and what an awesome program they have. They just said RIT once.

"Most of the big schools have never heard of RIT. For us, I like our role. No one knows what to expect.

"I've gotten to the point where I feel we can compete with anybody. If everyone does what they're supposed to do, anything can happen."

Stouffville alum helps Norwich ice NCAA Division III hockey title

Matt McCann, a former forward with the Stouffville Spirit junior A hockey club, was part of the Norwich Academy Cadets team that captured its third National Collegiate Athletic Association Division III title with a dramatic 2-1 double overtime win over St. Norbert College (De Pere, Wisc.) in Lake Placid, N.Y. Saturday.

Playing in 19 games this past season in his freshman year with the Norwich, Vt.-based Cadets, McCann, 21, compiled one goal and 11 assists.

A Newmarket native, McCann played for parts of two seasons with the Spirit in 2007-08 in which he was acquired in a trade with the Orangeville Crushers and 2008-09 before he was dealt that year to the Peterborough Liftlock Stars.