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**SPORTS:** Stouffville Spirit part new of 31-team OJHL

## Smaller Jr. A league gets back together

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA  
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

When you add water to a shot of whiskey you dilute the quality of it.

That analogy can also be applied to the current status of tier two junior A hockey - the more teams added the calibre of play tends to get diluted.

### TWO FEWER DURHAM TEAMS

Last weekend in Toronto, the board of governors from teams representing the 36 combined Ontario Junior A Hockey League and Central Canadian Hockey League clubs assembled to address that issue with the intent to improve the on-ice product.

Based on what transpired it appeared some positive headway was made as three teams ceased operations while four others merged into two.

The Couchiching Terriers, Bramalea Blues and Seguin Bruins, members last season in the 16-team Ontario Junior A Hockey League, elected to cease operations.

The Ajax Attack, members of the Central Canadian Hockey League this past season, merged with league rival Pickering Panthers.

The CCHL's Bowmanville Eagles merged with league rival Cobourg Cougars.

That leaves 31 tier two Jr. A teams to play in one circuit known as the Ontario Junior A Hockey League.

Chris Tambos, one of four Stouffville Spirit owners, attended the meetings and was pleased with what transpired.

"I think it's great," he said. "We're happy

with the results moving forward. We will be in a better league with fewer teams and we will be putting a better product on the ice.

"This move was first and foremost."

With the Terriers, Blues and Bruins folding shop, there will be a dispersal draft of players from those clubs. The lists of players from those three teams, he said, must be submitted by April 28.

In the case of the Eagles and Attack merging, Pickering and Cobourg will be allowed to protect 23 players each. A protected list from Pickering and Cobourg must be submitted by April 28, as well.

With 31 teams now remaining, Tambos said nothing has been laid out yet in terms of geographical divisional alignment.

Also to be discussed are potential rule changes and roster regulations including the use of 16-year-old players.

That could be resolved at the next board of governor's meeting on May 17.

### DIVISIONS TO BE ALIGNED

To get what contraction and amalgamation accomplished was a priority at last weekend's meeting, Tambos said.

When the teams gather at the same time next year, Tambos did not discount the notion of a further reduction of teams.

"This move was first and foremost. We're now happy with where things are," he said. "I think we will be a much more competitive league and there will be a greater effort to put a better product on the ice."

"We want this to be the best Jr. A league in Ontario and eventually Canada."

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