

Many happy returns for Spirit on weekend

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The Labour Day weekend is a time when the Stouffville Spirit is forced to play the waiting game.

Sitting on pins and needles, officials with the Ontario Junior A Hockey League club were anxious to find out which players who elected to skate with major junior Ontario Hockey League teams that drafted them would return after the first few days of training camp.

When the dust settled, the Spirit let out a big sigh of relief after five of six players returned to the fold enabling the club to move a step closer to finalizing their roster for this Friday's regular season opener on the road against the Huntsville Otters.

CARRICK BACK IN TOWN

Those returning included defenceman Brennan Serville, Blake Stevenson and Stouffville resident Trevor Carrick along with forwards Tyler Ferry and Drake Caggiula.

The Spirit's lone loss was defenceman Ryan Zupancic, who was signed by the Sarnia Sting.

"Sure, we'll miss Ryan," Spirit head coach Craig Donovan conceded. "He was a big strong kid and

just 16 years old, who won't turn 17 until November. But we got Jack Caradonna and Paul Geiger (both acquisitions from the Markham Waxers) and Blake Stevenson back, so we're dealing with Ryan's absence."

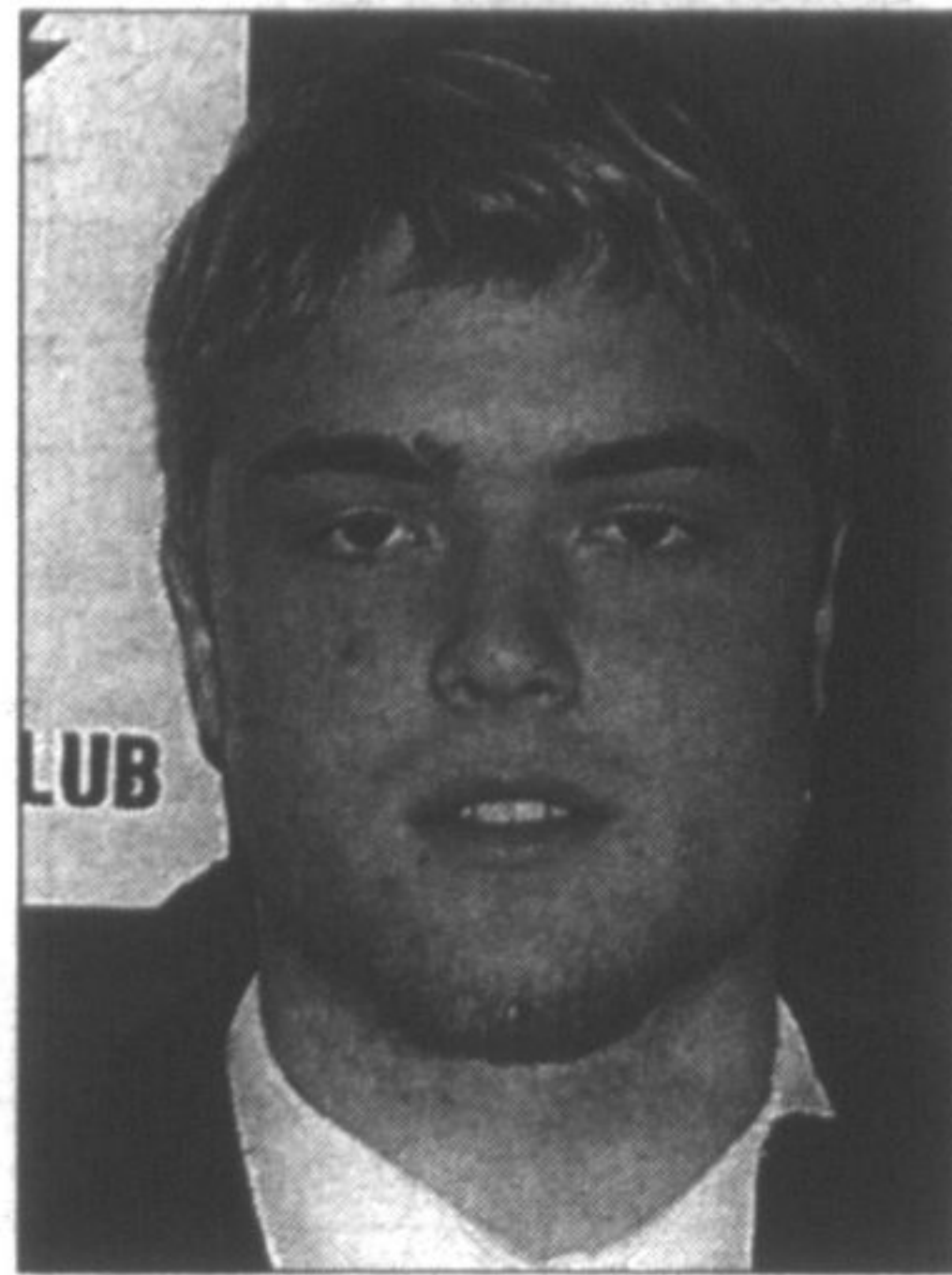
Of those who returned, Donovan was pleasantly surprised they got Caggiula, a third-round pick of the Erie Otters in this year's OHL priority selection, and Carrick, a fifth-round selection of the Mississauga-St. Michael's Majors, back on their roster.

Donovan noted Carrick, the younger brother of OHL players Sam (Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds) and Jake (Brampton Battalion) Carrick, was the last defenceman released by the Majors.

"We were definitely worried we might not see Drake or Trevor," Donovan said. "But I think with Mississauga-St. Mike's hosting the Memorial Cup, they wanted to go with a more experienced lineup."

"And Erie had a few early round draft picks and Drake decided to come back."

As for speculation that Serville might sign with the Sudbury Wolves, that was all for naught as Donovan speculated. With the Pickering resident verbally accept-



RYAN ZUPANCIC: Lone Spirit player to stick in the Ontario Hockey League signs with Sarnia Sting.

ing an offer to attend Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., next fall, he wanted to attend Sudbury's camp to see where he might fit in.

"I think he's good enough to play at the OHL level," Donovan said of his second-year defenceman. "But I think he just went there to see how he could compete."

In attempting to finalize their roster, the Spirit are trying to make a trade to accommodate netminder Joseph Chemello, who played a reserve role last season in backing

up Kori Coelho.

A deal was tentatively made last week to send Chemello to Upper Canada in exchange for cash.

But the deal fell through when Chemello refused to report to Upper Canada, which plays out of the MasterCard Centre for Hockey Excellence in Toronto, due to difficulty in travel and interference with school. The Spirit is now trying to make another deal for Chemello.

Donovan named Aaron Green as his starting goalie. Green, 20, played last season at the Jr. A level with the now defunct Seguin Bruins. The Mount Albert resident has also played Jr. A in Collingwood.

Backing up Green will be Mike Sheremeta, a graduate of the Pickering midgets.

"We had two guys who could be No. 1 (in Green and Chemello) and it didn't make sense to have one on the bench," Donovan said.

"Joseph did a good job for us last year in backing up Kori and he asked to start somewhere... He needs to be a starter at this level and we were glad to help Joseph out. We wish him well."

As for the rest of the Spirit roster, Donovan feels their forward units are fairly set with the return of Matt Neal, Chris Porter, Declan Gunovs-

ki, Tyler Ferry and Andrew Doyle.

"These guys are a year older and stronger," Donovan said.

Bolstering their forward lines has been the addition of Christian Finch, who played on the blueline last year.

Donovan noted that in the club's last three pre-season outings, which included an 8-7 shootout win over the host St. Michael's Buzzers last Friday, Finch has accumulated 10 points.

VETERAN GOALTENDER

Also pleasing Donovan has been the play of first-year forwards and Stouffville residents Mike Robinson and Robbie Acton. Both are 17-year-olds who played major midget last year. Acton is the son of Toronto Maple Leafs assistant coach Keith Acton.

Another son, Will Acton, played three seasons in Spiritland. Now 23, he's a senior at Lake Superior State in Michigan.

After Friday's regular season opener, the Spirit will make their Stouffville Arena debut Sunday against the Burlington Cougars at 2:10 p.m.

WhiStle Radio (102.7 FM) will broadcast most Spirit home games live, starting with Sunday's contest.

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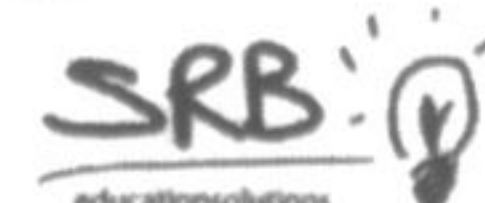
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