

SPORTS: Stouffville Jr. A hockey notebook

Spirit welcomes back NHL prospect, high-energy play



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

LAST WEEK: Friday: Markham Waxers 3 vs. Stouffville Spirit 2 (shootout). Sunday: Stouffville Spirit 5 vs. Oakville Blades 2. Spirit record: 10 wins, one shootout win, five losses, one shootout loss, two overtime losses, 25 points. Third place in Ontario Junior Hockey League's North Division.

COMING UP: Tonight: Stouffville at Newmarket Hurricanes, 7:30 p.m. (Rogers TV) Sunday: Collingwood Blackhawks vs. Stouffville at Stouffville Arena, 2:10 p.m. (WhiStle Radio)

GAME NOTES: Craig Donovan doesn't ask too much from his Stouffville Spirit players. But the one thing the Spirit head coach requests from those who step onto the ice is that they play with a high degree of intensity. After Donovan told his club it did not compete hard enough in last Thursday's 3-2 road loss to the Newmarket Hurricanes, the Spirit took those words to heart last weekend.

Taking to the road for a Friday tilt against the Markham Waxers, the Spirit gave the first-place North Division Waxers all they could handle before falling 3-2 in a shootout. The outcome was decided when the Waxers' eighth shooter, Jamie Lewis, scored on recently acquired netminder Dalton McGrath. Trailing 1-0 after one period and 2-0 early in the second period, the Spirit responded with a power-play goal from Billy Lovatsis and even strength tally from Matt Neal to even the count at 2-2 entering the third period. The Spirit, who missed several good scoring chances during regulation time, outshot the Waxers 39-33.

In Sunday's contest, the Spirit jumped out to a 2-0 lead through 20 minutes on goals 46 seconds apart by Declan Gunovski and Drake Caggiula. After Oakville stormed back to tie the game early in the second period, the Spirit regained the upper hand entering the third period on a power-play goal from Kyle McLaughlin. The Spirit carried that momentum into the third period when Caggiula delivered a power-play goal and Gunovski iced the game with an empty net goal with just 11 seconds left in regulation time. The Blades outshot the Spirit 35-31.

INSIDER: In an effort to shore up their goaltending, the Spirit acquired McGrath, 19, in a cash deal with the Ontario Junior Hockey League. Spirit co-owner and general manager Ken Burrows said with McGrath playing a part of last season with the now defunct Couchiching Terriers, the team was only required to pay the league an undisclosed fee to acquire his rights. McGrath also played a part of last season with the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League. In the 2008-09 campaign, McGrath was with Couchiching. In acquiring McGrath, Burrows said the deal came up rather quickly as he

received a call from a friend just two weeks ago who informed him McGrath was in Gatineau, Que., playing for a tier two team. Burrows speculated what might have swayed McGrath into joining the team was in having been former teammates with defenceman Christian Finch in the Greater Toronto Hockey League and Gunovski, while the two were in Couchiching. With McGrath signed, the Spirit dealt goalie Aaron Green to the St. Michael's Buzzers for cash. After missing almost one month nursing a knee injury, Spirit defenceman and NHL prospect Brennan Serville returned to active duty in Sunday's win over Oakville. Those still nursing injuries include forward Kory Kennedy, who incurred a cut during last Thursday's loss to Newmarket and defenceman Daniel Fitzgerald, out day to day with a leg muscle strain.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "In our loss last Thursday to Newmarket, we didn't compete hard enough to win. We made two mistakes that led to two of their goals.

"But it seems like when we play Markham it's always a high-energy game and I thought we played well. Sure it was a heartbreaking loss, but we thought we had the better scoring chances and we felt we deserved to win the game in regulation time," Donovan said.

"The bottom line was that the effort was there and it carried over into Sunday. I thought it was one of our most complete efforts where we played a strong game," Donovan said.

In assessing Sunday's win, Donovan felt the key was getting off to a good start.

"We knew entering the game Oakville was playing their third game in as many days and we emphasized we needed to have a good first period to get at them and we did when we went up 2-0.

"But Oakville didn't quit when they tied it up at 2-2, but we went back after them with our forecheck."

As for the return of Serville, Donovan said his presence made a big difference.

"We tried to limit his ice time since it was his first game back in almost a month, but he played well. It's a big plus to have him back."

In assessing McGrath's presence between the pipes, Donovan said he's been a great addition.

"He has a proven track record with Couchiching and at the major junior level (with Barrie) and he's played well for us so far. He's big (six feet, three inches tall) and he controls rebounds well."

For more on the Spirit, go to: www.stouffvillespirit.com

— Michael Hayakawa

Stouffville Spirit forward Chris Porter tries to put the puck past Oakville Blades goaltender Daniel Savelli, during Sunday afternoon hockey action at the Stouffville Arena. The Spirit, which won 5-2, plays Newmarket tonight in a game broadcast on Rogers TV.

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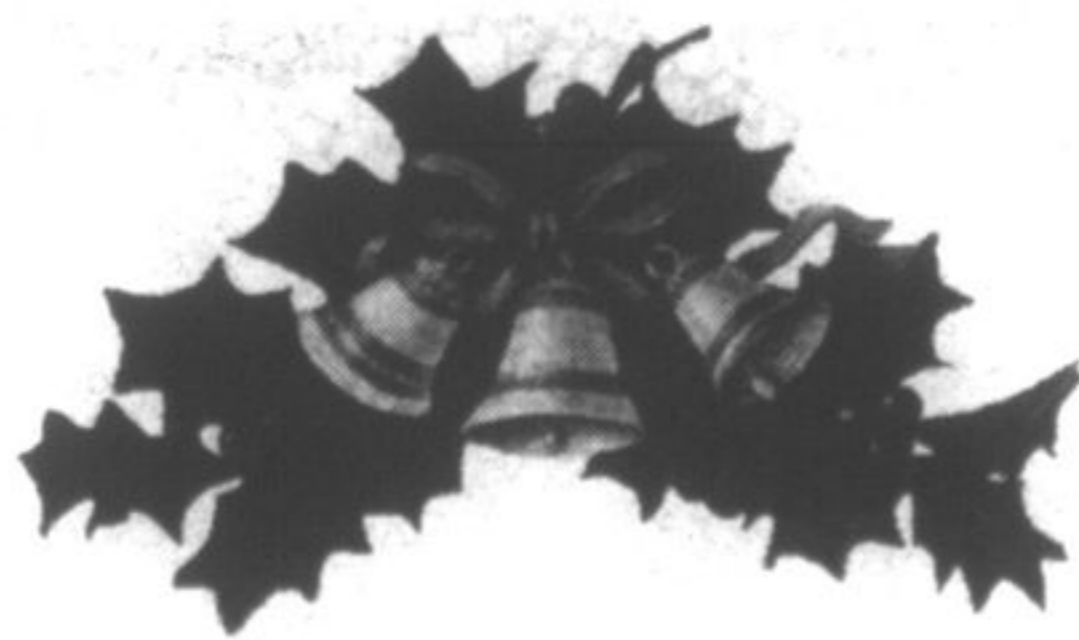
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