

# CLIPPER TEAMS COULD GO AA

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**DON EASTER:** Minor hockey president says local teams could lose players to area AA centres.

Could rep teams from the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association raise their classification to AA from the current A status?

Considering how the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville continues to grow in population and with two double-pad indoor facilities now for their rep minor hockey program, it's inevitable such a change will take place at some point in the future.

But it could take place far sooner than anticipated.

Don Easter, Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association president, said such a move could be predicated on proposed changes to Ontario Minor Hockey Association regulations governing residency and player movement.

Speaking before a gathering of parents, coaches and association board members at a WSMHA town hall meeting Monday on this subject, Easter noted the proposed changes, if ratified by a special general meeting of OMHA members Jan. 23, would allow players 11 years of age and older to try out, and if successful, play for a rep team at the AA centre nearest to their residence.

If approved, the new regulations would come into effect starting next season.

With Whitchurch-Stouffville currently categorized as an A centre and bordering on five AA centres, they could be vulnerable to losing players.

Right now, Whitchurch-Stouffville

players can jump from A to AAA but not AA.

In turn, this could have a negative impact on the Clippers' rep program if a number of the more skilled players left to play on AA teams in neighbouring centres with the intention to seek higher calibre competition.

"I think most people accept the idea that allowing players to compete against players of similar ability is a good thing for all concerned, and therefore the proposed changes have merit," Easter said. "However, it's pretty sobering to think that for reasons of geography our Clipper teams could be less capable of competing against other A centres which are less likely to lose their better players to AA."

During the meeting, it was suggested the WSMHA should consider applying for a AA designation as a means of providing local players with an opportunity to compete against higher calibre competition while still playing for their home town.

Easter acknowledged that applying to the OMHA for a AA categorization was a possibility the board might at least have to consider if, as expected, the new regulations are ratified Jan. 23.

He noted moving to AA was part of the board's medium-term thinking.

But such a decision might now have to be taken sooner rather than later.

While disappointed in what he felt was a low number turnout for the meeting, Easter felt it served a good purpose.

"I think the meeting accomplished what we hoped it would," he said. "It would have been nice to see more families represented as we have close to 300 rep players in our association."

"But those who did attend were certainly engaged, asked some great questions and weren't shy in terms of providing their opinions — not only as it related to new regulations, but how our association might proceed should these changes be adopted."

With Whitchurch-Stouffville eligible to send up to 21 delegates to the Jan. 23 OMHA meeting, the session also provided an opportunity for potential delegates to obtain first-hand feedback from members regarding the proposed changes.

## Spirit streak at 8

The Stouffville Spirit did not get off to the best of starts when they played host to the Mississauga Chargers in their Ontario Junior Hockey League game at the Stouffville Arena Thursday.

Trailing 2-0 after 20 minutes appeared to serve as a wake up call for the Spirit, who erupted for four unanswered goals in the second period and added another two in the third en route to a 6-3 win.

Helping the Spirit record their eighth straight win was an effective power play, which converted four of 10 opportunities, including three in the second period.

A power-play goal by Christian Finch just over two minutes into the second launched the comeback.

With the Spirit enjoying a two-man advantage just a little over six minutes into the period, Matt Neal scored to tie the game.

### POWER PLAY CLICKING

Just 49 seconds later, Drake Caggiula scored with the man advantage to give the Spirit the lead for good. Paul Geiger then lit the red light just 13 seconds later to give the Spirit a 4-2 lead.

After the Chargers scored before the period concluded to cut their deficit to within a goal, the Spirit got a goal from Brennan Serville at the 4:30 mark to restore their two-goal margin at 5-3.

A power-play goal by Trevor Carrick with close to four minutes remaining in the third period rounded out the scoring.

Recently acquired netminder Jon Hall made his debut for the Spirit and handled 21 of 24 shots. The Spirit fired 38 shots on the Mississauga net.

Now 24 wins, two overtime wins, one shootout win against eight losses, three shootout losses and one overtime loss for 55 points, the third-place Spirit moved to within three points of the second-place Markham Waxers in the North Division.

After yesterday's game in Collingwood, the Spirit will host the Orangeville Flyers at the Stouffville Arena Sunday at 2:10 p.m.

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