

Ex-Waxer haunts former team

BY JIM MASON
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The Markham Waxers traded a 16-year-old Tyler vonEngelbrechten for some veteran help four years ago before they went on an extended playoff run.

VonEngelbrechten returned to haunt the Waxers this month, helping lead the Stouffville Spirit to a six-game win in the second round of the Ontario Junior Hockey League postseason.

The Markham resident had six points in the four games, including a hat trick Sunday as the Spirit ended the series with a dominant 10-5 win in front of more than 600 people at the Stouffville Arena.

"It's unbelievable," he said outside the Spirit dressing room. "It's good to beat them, for sure."

The rangy forward with the gifted shot asked the Pickering Panthers to trade him to the Spirit early this season.

And not just because he had played in all of four playoff games during three years in Pickering.

NCAA coaches all but demanded it. They were interested, but wanted to see him play with and against better players in the post-season.

"Playoff experience is huge - apparently," deadpanned vonEngelbrechten, who could only watch friends in the postseason much of the last three years.

Spirit GM Kenny Burrows eventually bought his rights from the Panthers on last month's trade deadline. VonEngelbrechten delivered 39 points in 21 games at the end of the regular season.

It helped that best friend - "since we were like five years old" - Jack Caradonna joined the Spirit last summer from the Waxers. They went all through school together and live 100 metres from each other.

"They're never apart," quipped Spirit head coach Craig Donovan as the two spoke in the hallway of the Ninth Line rink.

VonEngelbrechten attends York University and works at Play It Again Sports in Markham, both part time, awaiting that scholarship offer.

Linemates Christian Finch - another Markham native on the Spirit roster - and Matt Neal had a goal and three assists for the Spirit, who trailed the series 2-1 less than a week before. Trevor Carrick and Andrew Doyle had singles for the Spirit, which held period leads of 3-0 and 6-1.

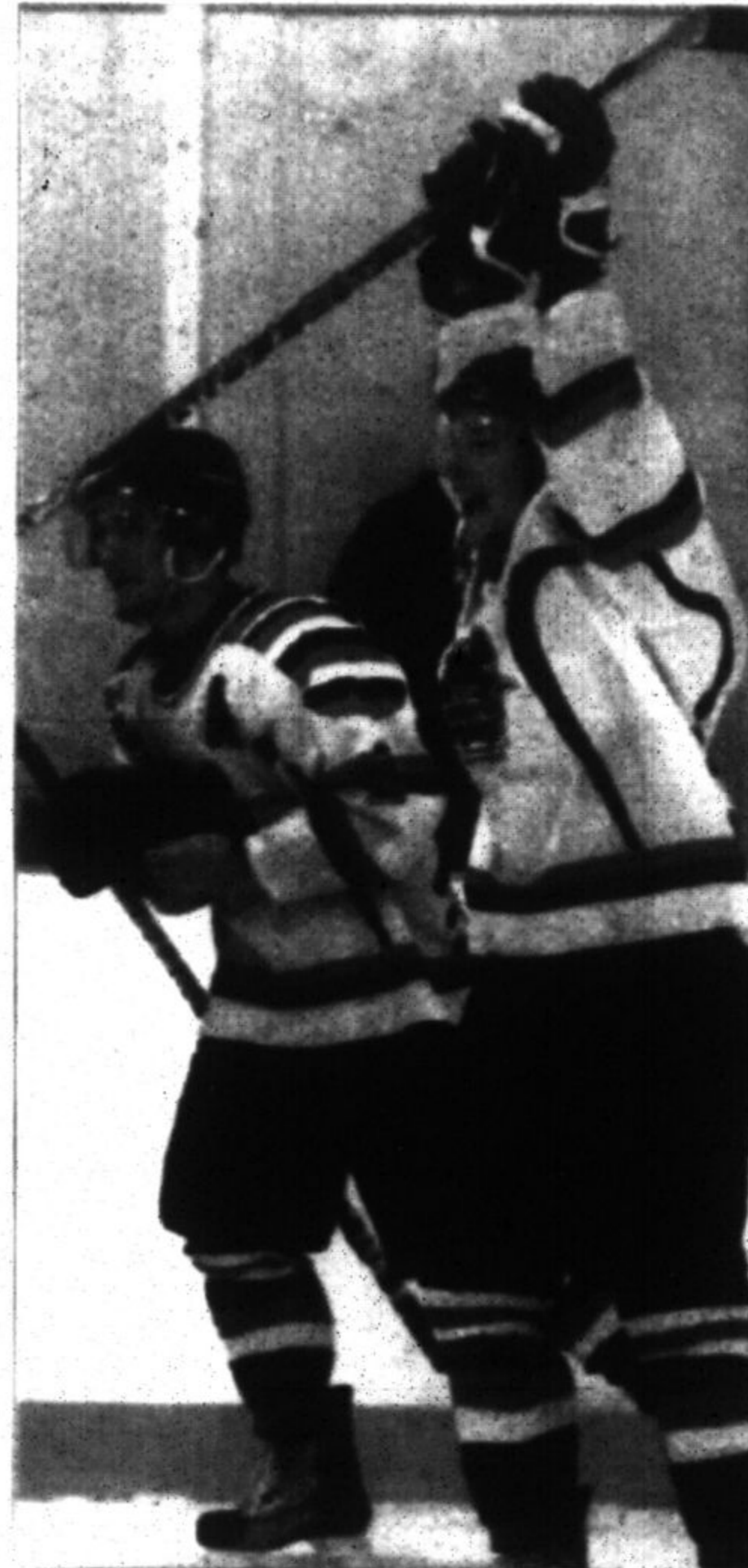
Justin MacDonald, another Markham resident purchased from Pickering at the deadline, and Jordan Bean added empty-netters.

The Waxers, who were outshot 48-42, rotated goalies Tanner Davis and Drew Fielding throughout the afternoon.

As well advertised as the Spirit-Waxer rivalry was promoted, it was the first time the teams ever met in the playoffs.

The large playoff crowds have been noted by the Spirit players, who gave a well-choreographed centre-ice salute to the faithful after shaking hands with the Waxers.

"The community's been great," said Donovan. "And it doesn't go unnoticed by the kids. They play off of those loud ovations every time they leave the ice."



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Markham products Jack Caradonna (left) and Christian Finch celebrate eliminating the Markham Waxers.

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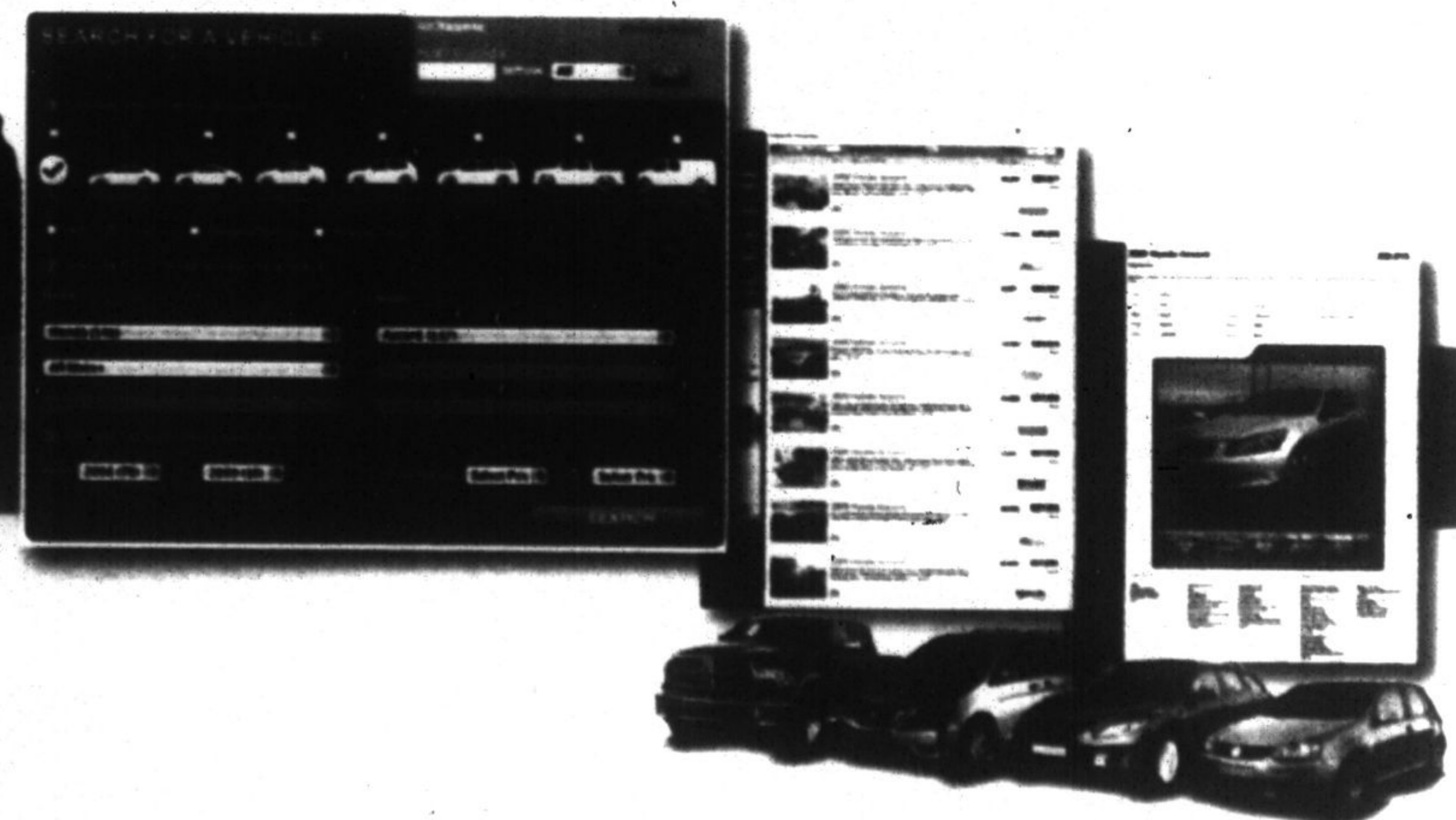
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