



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

New York State native Jon Hall follows the flying puck as Stouffville Spirit teammate Trevor Carrick clears out a Newmarket Hurricane during Hall's 3-0 shutout Sunday in Stouffville.

Shell-shocked in Collingwood, Hall likes support in Stouffville

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Early in the Ontario Junior Hockey League regular season, Jon Hall could have sued his teammates for non-support.

While playing for the Collingwood Blackhawks, a team that wallowed in the North Division cellar, the 20-year-old netminder could easily have suffered shell shock after being deluged by a barrage of shots each game.

But since being dealt to the Stouffville Spirit by the Blackhawks on the league's trade deadline in early January, Hall's workload has been considerably reduced.

Same for his productivity. Hall recorded a nifty 1.98 goals against average and .919 save percentage while playing in nine regular season games with the Spirit. That's a vast improvement from a 6.25 goals against average and .870 save percentage in 29 games with Collingwood.

Life for Hall these days is far more enjoyable. Especially since the Spirit are in the postseason and Hall's performance played an integral role eliminating the Markham Waxers during their second round and taking a 2-1 lead into Game 4 with Newmarket tonight in the third round. He has played every minute of all nine playoff games.

FORMER FORWARD

"When I was with Collingwood, I was averaging around 40 shots a game, but since coming to Stouffville I'm seeing around 25 to 30. It's been a big difference and my work has been made far easier," Hall said.

"Nothing has changed," he said. "I just went from seeing tough, quality shots to shots where the rebounds are cleared out by our defence and the offence has played good defence."

Growing up in Watertown, N.Y., Hall played most of his youth hockey there and was employed as a forward at the request of his father, a former netminder himself.

"My dad didn't want me to play in goal until I could learn how to skate and handle the puck," he said.

By the time Hall began playing at the pee-wee level, he donned the pads and has guarded the twine ever since.

"What I like about playing in goal is that you get to play the whole game and you get to help the guys who are out in front of me," he said.

KINGSTON AUDITION

Hall's entry to the OJHL began last year when he auditioned for the Kingston Voyageurs. They did not have a spot for him on their roster but suggested he go to Collingwood, who at that time needed a goalkeeper.

Hall played with the team then known as the Blues and saw action in 23 games and had a 4.31 goals against average and .886 save percentage.

Hall hopes his play will enable him to continue his playing career at the collegiate level once he leaves the Spirit, who could retain his services for one more season.

Since joining the Spirit, Hall was given the nod by head coach Craig Donovan to be the club's regular netminder.

"He's a big kid who can cover a lot of net," Donovan said of six-foot, four-inch, 210-pound Hall. "His winning record and results with us have been good. Sure, there's maybe two or three goals he would have liked back from the Markham series. But he competes hard and he has a great personality around the dressing room. We enjoy having him. He's played pretty good for us."

"If we're going to beat Newmarket, Jon has to play well," he said.

Tonight's game begins at 7:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena. Game 5 returns to the Ray Twinney Complex in Newmarket Sunday at 4:30 p.m. A sixth game would be played at the Stouffville Arena Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. A seventh game would be played at the Ray Twinney Complex next Thursday at 8 p.m. WhiStle Radio is broadcasting home and away games. Rogers TV has the games from Newmarket only.

Head shots irk Spirit coach

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"It was a must-win game for us so we had to make sure we all were firing on all cylinders," said Leavens, a 17-year-old forward acquired earlier in the season from the Hamilton Red Wings. "We were down in both the first two games so we needed it. Going down three games would be a tough hole to come out of. Going into their barn down 2-1 is better. I don't think we're in a bad situation."

After a scoreless second period, Stouffville's Paul Geiger squeezed a powerplay goal past Hurricanes' netminder Jimmy Sarjeant between Newmarket tallies by Bowman Webster and Ian Farrell in the third period to close out the scoring.

The Spirit finished with a 31-30 edge in shots on goal.

"We knew coming into the series there is no way we would sweep, Newmarket is too good for that to happen," said Spirit captain Declan Gunovski, a Newmarket resident. "The thing with Newmarket is they come out hard in the first five minutes and go from there. We have to learn to weather the storm."

"Good teams overcome adversity. Next game we'll make more work for ourselves if we allow them to get on a roll. Tonight gave us a wakeup call. But if we stay focused on this game we'll forget about the game coming up."

For Hurricanes head coach Brian Perrin, the victory was a step in the right direction. He knows his club still isn't out of the woods.

"We got back to the way we were play-

ing all year but we still have a lot of work ahead of us going back to their rink," said the Whitchurch-Stouffville resident, who was named the OJHL coach of the year Monday. "We still need better effort."

Similar sentiments were expressed by his opposite number down the hall.

"We played the first period as if it was going to be easy," said Spirit coach Craig Donovan. "Our guys played completely unprepared and put ourselves behind the eight-ball. You can't do that in the playoffs."

Stouffville 3, Newmarket 0

The Spirit skated to a 3-0 victory on home ice Sunday to take a two-games-to-none lead in the series.

Led by the 30-save goaltending of Jon Hall and a pair of powerplay goals set up by Matt Neal, the Spirit took command of the series at Stouffville Arena with a solid effort to repel the OJHL regular season champion Hurricanes.

While Hall was doing his thing, Neal set up Tyler vonEngelbrechten's game-winning goal in the 12th minute of the second period with a nifty cross-crease pass and was in on a Christian tap-in from a rebound 36 seconds into the third period. Andrew Doyle added an empty-net goal with 59 seconds to go to complete the scoring.

Donovan was not at all pleased with his interpretation of the Hurricanes physical play, including a five-minute major and two-game suspension to Kevin Balas for a head check on Spirit rookie Drake Caggiula.

"I'm disappointed in the number of times our heads have been targeted."

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