Sniper fires game-winner after three-week layoff

BY JIM MASON jmason@yrmg.com

Justin MacDonald was dying to get on the ice a week earlier.

Thursday, he felt like he was "dying" on it. The former resident of Texas had enough left to score the game-winner as the Stouffville Spirit won 2-1 over the Wellington Dukes in front of about 800 fans at the Stouffville Arena Thursday. The best-of-seven Ontario Junior Hockey League semifinal series was tied at one game apiece.

MacDonald hadn't played a Jr. A game in three weeks. Obtained from the Pickering Panthers on the trade deadline, he was placed on a Jr. C card with the Stayner Siskins, meaning he had to stay with the Siskins until their playoffs ended. That happened Sunday, the same night the Spirit lost 2-1 in overtime in Wellington to open the series.

"You can work out all you want, but I'm certainly not in game shape," he said under a brilliant red Mohawk. "Cardio-wise, I was dying. And then you're on the berich and (your line) gets called again. But I just have to suck it up. You deal with it. It's playoffs."

MacDonald lived in Newmarket until he was 10, then moved to Texas with his family. They now live in Markham.

He had to watch his teammates come back from a three-goal deficit and eliminate Newmarket in overtime in Game 7 two Thursdays ago to advance against Wellington.

ROGERS

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"I wanted so badly to be out there," he said. MacDonald has six goals and two assists in eight Spirit playoff games.

None was more precise than his top-shelf winner Thursday that gave the Spirit a 2-0 lead after one and through two periods.

Tyler von Engelbrechten, Spirit general manager Kenny Burrows' other late-season acquisition from Pickering, had the first Spirit goal.

The ex-Panthers beat Wellington's muchdecorated goalie, Jordan Ruby. The NCAAbound - RIT in Rochester, N.Y. - keeper wasn't surprised the series was tied 1-1.

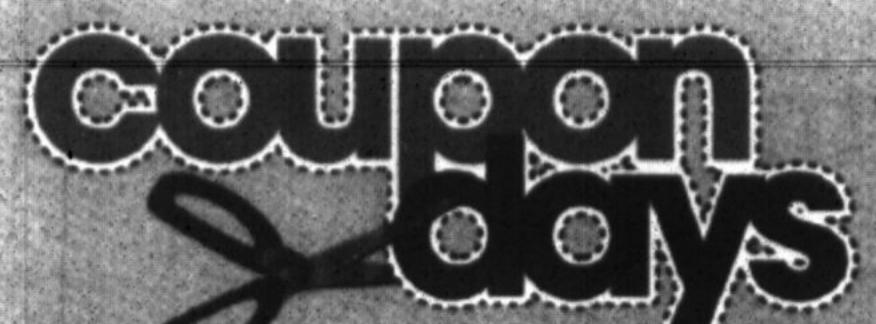
"When you get this far in the playoffs, you've got to think it will be close," he said. "It's an automatic six or seven-game series."

From Tavistock, near Kitchener, Ruby, 20, wasn't drafted by an Ontario Hockey League team. He played two years of Jr. B with the Stratford Cullitons before e-mailing Wellington and asking for a tryout two years ago.

Ruby and Spirit goalie Ion Hall were the stars of the game, drawing loud ovations from the near packed house.

The third game was scheduled for Wellington last night. Game 4 goes Sunday at the





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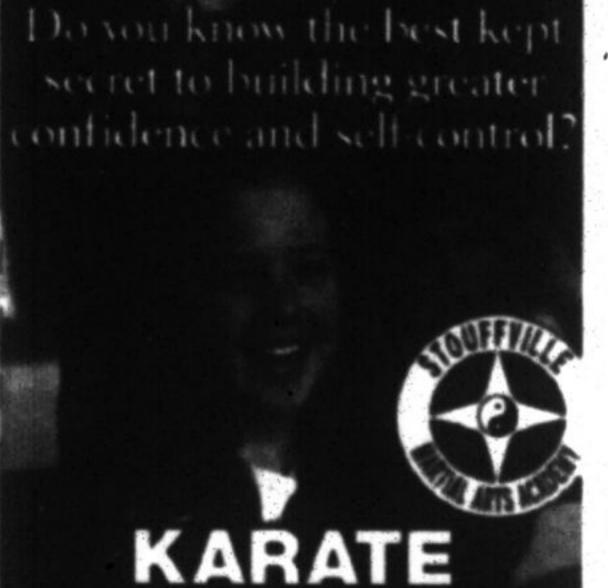
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