

# Fans had lots to salute

From page 1.

For never quitting, highlighted by your now legendary Game 7 6-5 comeback win in overtime in Newmarket March 17. There was no quit in these kids right through the final nail-biting seconds of Thursday's finale.

For doing it all with so much class. Organizations of all kinds, be they big business or small town, take on the personality of their leaders. Look no farther than captain Declan Gunovski for Exhibit A in Spiritville.

The fan favourite speaks with elegance and passion. He plays the game with courage and heart.

"All from probably the smallest guy in our league," Spirit head coach Craig Donovan said of his captain, who is listed at five feet, eight inches. "This run was especially special for him - Gunner hadn't won a playoff game in three years before this season."

Gunovski, who will play for the Fredonia State Blue Devils near Buffalo next year, is already eyeing law school after graduation.

The Spirit looks to next season knowing it will lose about half its players to graduation.

"That's a typical number every year," Donovan said. "We lose some great players, but we know there are guys ready to step up. They've shown that during our playoffs. And we know (general manager) Kenny (Burrows) is already out there identifying new talent with his keen eye."

Gone to the Ontario Hockey League will be Tyler Ferry (London) and Trevor Carrick (Mississauga).

Brennan Serville (Michigan) and Matt Neal (RPI) have Division 1 NCAA deals in place.

The 20-year-olds - Gunovski, Tyler von Engelbrechten, Justin MacDonald, Jack Caradonna and Billy Lovatsis - will be too old next season.

There will be more NCAA commitments shortly, Donovan promised.

The annual hockey cycle starts again with rookie camp three weeks from Friday on the same Stouffville Arena ice.

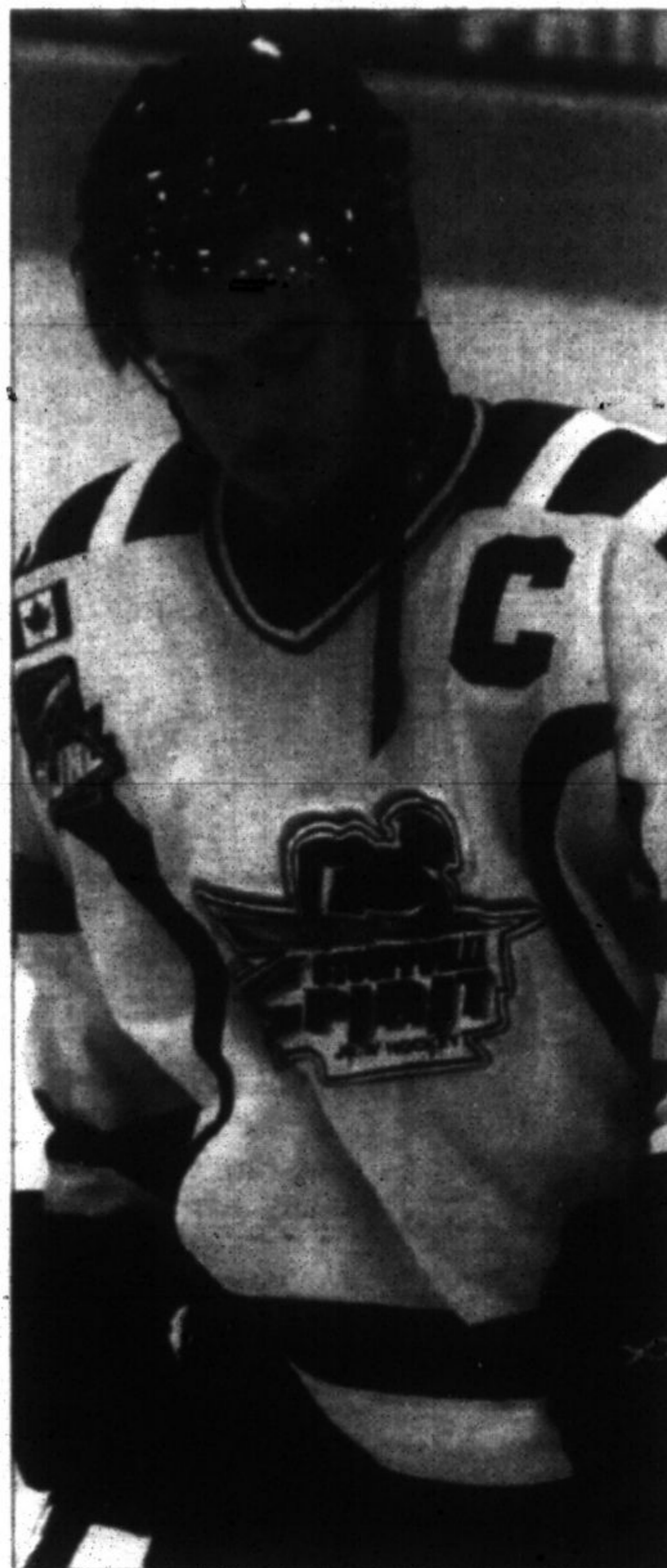
For now, there was a season to remember.

The Stouffville faithful saluted the Spirit for the second-longest playoff run in franchise history - only the 2006 league finalists went farther - with a standing ovation after Thursday's game.

"The fans have been amazing," said Gunovski, a Newmarket resident traded to the Spirit from now-defunct Couchiching three seasons ago. "It raises your game and the team's morale. People took time out of their day to come see us play and we tried to give it our best for them."

"We would have loved to raise a banner in here," he said, shirt off to show his chiselled upper body, "to give people something to remember from this team. But it wasn't in the cards."

No problem there, captain. *Jim Mason, a former director of the Stouffville Spirit, is editor of The Sun-Tribune.*



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Classy Spirit captain Declan Gunovski leaves the Stouffville Arena ice following his final Jr. A hockey game Thursday.

## SHINING RUBY LEADS DUKES INTO OJHL FINAL SERIES

The Wellington Dukes will ride the hot hand of Jordan Ruby into the Ontario Junior Hockey League finals.

The perennial powerhouse defeated the Stouffville Spirit 3-2 at the Stouffville Arena Thursday to win their best-of-seven semifinal series four games to two.

The Dukes will face the winner of last night's Game 7 showdown between the Kingston Voyageurs and Oakville Blades for the league title, the Buckland Cup.

Ruby, who will play NCAA pucks at RIT in Rochester, N.Y., next year, was the story of the game and probably the series.

"Ruby took it to another level," Spirit coach Craig Donovan said. "He's been very good for a couple of years, but he elevated it even more. He was the difference in almost all six games."

Donovan counted 10 large saves Thursday in the third period alone in front of 941 fans.

The Dukes, who outshot the Spirit 32-30 on the night, were outshot 13-4 in the third.

The Dukes broke a 1-1 tie with two goals in the second half of the second period.

They played rope-a-dope with the Spirit for much of the third. Tyler von Engelbrechten, playing with broken ribs since the Markham Waxers series, beat Ruby with 4:40 to go but the puck rang loudly off the inside post and scooted into the corner.

Christian Finch, who scored the Spirit's other goal to tie the score at 1-1 just 57 seconds into the second period, scored on Ruby with 2:10 to go, going high glove slide.

The Spirit had more chances, including Matt Neal from point blank with 20 seconds left in regulation, but could not get the equalizer.

Donovan wondered what might have been without the injury bug plaguing his roster. Most notable was the loss of super rookie Drake Caggiola to a concussion, courtesy of a head shot in the Newmarket series.

"The hardest part is that with our full lineup, I think we're a better team (than Wellington)," he said.

- Jim Mason

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