

Neal nets pair of awards as Spirit celebrates big season

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The 2010-11 Ontario Junior Hockey League season was a memorable one for the Stouffville Spirit after they had a hot second half and advanced to the semifinals before bowing out to the eventual champion Wellington Dukes.

While the team had a vintage campaign, it was also rewarding for several individuals.

At the club's year-end gathering Sunday, the Spirit honoured its top players.

Matt Neal claimed two of the club's top awards as he was its leading scorer and most valuable player.

During the regular season, Neal compiled 40 goals and 60 assists in 50 contests to lead all Spirit scorers.

NCAA SCHOLARSHIP

Neal, 19, continued his scoring wizardry into the OJHL postseason, as the veteran forward led all scorers with 10 goals and 20 assists in 19 tilts.

Neal will be attending Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., this fall on a hockey scholarship.

Among other awards handed out, forward Drake Caggiula and defenceman Trevor Carrick shared rookie-of-the-year honours.

A third-round draft pick of the Erie Otters in the 2010 OHL priority selection but opting to play with the Spirit, Caggiula, 17, scored 22 goals and added 23 assists in 46 regular season games.

In eight playoff contests before his season ended after incurring a concussion against the Newmarket Hurricanes, Caggiula had

two goals and six assists in eight tilts.

A fifth-round draft pick of the Mississauga-St. Michael's Majors in the 2010 OHL draft, Carrick, 16, had six goals and 13 assists in 40 regular season games. The Stouffville native was the club's third-leading scorer during the postseason with two goals and 11 assists in 19 contests.

Spirit head coach Craig Donovan made the individual year-end selections with club co-owner and general manager Kenny Burrows and the rest of the coaching staff. Caggiula and Carrick were each fully deserving of being named top rookie, he said.

"It was like trying to split hairs," Donovan said. "We had compelling arguments as to why each should win it. Both were named to the top All Prospect teams as rookies."

Andrew Doyle was named the club's most sportsmanlike player.

Doyle, 19, had 12 goals and 16 assists in 46 regular season games while incurring just 16 minutes in penalties during that span.

"He went hard into the corners and played an aggressive style," Donovan said in describing the six-foot, two-inch, 183-pound forward's play. "And to just get 16 minutes in penalties said a lot."

First-year defenceman Paul Geiger was chosen as the team's most improved player.

During the regular season, the 18-year-old, six-foot, three-inch, 195-pound Stouffville resident amassed three goals and 31 assists in 50 games.

"He plays a simple, but effective game," Donovan said of the Stouffville resident's play. "As the games got faster and more intense, his game got better and better."



Christian Finch (from left) Paul Geiger, Jack Caradonna, Trevor Carrick, Drake Caggiula, and Matt Neal received awards at the Stouffville Spirit's year-end party last weekend.

"By the end of the season, he was a go-to type of defenceman for us."

Jack Caradonna was awarded the club's top defenceman award.

'HEART AND SOUL'

Obtained this past season from the Markham Waxers, the 21-year-old Markham native had 10 goals and 31 assists in 47 regular season tilts.

Caradonna will be combining his education and hockey at the State University at New York-Geneseo this fall.

Captain Declan Gunovski was given the club's coaches award.

During the regular season, the 20-year-old forward recorded 28 goals and 26 assists in just his second season with the Spirit.

"He was a great leader for us," Donovan said of Gunovski. "He did all the things we asked. He was the heart and soul of our team."

Christian Finch was named the club's post-season MVP.

A defenceman who was converted into a forward this season, the 20-year-old Unionville native was the club's second-leading scorer during the regular season and postseason.

"He got big goals or assisted on big goals for us during the playoffs," Donovan said.

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