

# Spirit has tough act to follow

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Last season, the Stouffville Spirit experienced a memorable campaign, advancing to the Ontario Junior Hockey League semifinals.

While that's now a thing of the past, the Spirit hopes history has a way of repeating when it begins the 2011-12 regular season Friday on the road against the Huntsville Otters.

"Last year, we had a taste of going to the final four and ideally we want to get back there," said Spirit head coach Craig Donovan. "Realistically though, our goal is to try and get better each week as we move through the season."

It starts up front.

"Obviously we're going to miss a guy like Matt Neal (who led the Spirit in scoring last season during the regular season and playoffs)," he said. "But we have more depth up front one through 14 and we have more maturity as compared with last year."

To fill the void left by Neal, who is now at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Donovan looks to several returnees.

They include Christian Finch, the Spirit's second-leading scorer last year during the regular season and playoffs who will attend Clarkson University for next fall, Chris Porter, Kory Kennedy and captain Andrew Doyle.

"To finish the way he did points wise last year after being moved to forward and getting 86 points, we expect Christian to be there again," Donovan said. "But we will also ask Christian to play more of a role on the defensive side."

Porter and Kennedy, said Donovan, got bigger, stronger and faster over the summer.

"Andrew will get a lot of ice time because he does things right all the time. He's one of the top defensive forwards in our league and he will help out on our special teams, especially our penalty killing," Donovan said of Doyle.

## FORWARD LINES SOLID

Local products Mike Robinson and Robert Acton as well as Dylan Savoury should benefit after having one year of Jr. A experience.

Adding depth to the forward units were the offseason acquisitions Alex Botten from the Orangeville Flyers and Tommy Tsicos from the now defunct Collingwood Blackhawks.

Tsicos got a late start after breaking a finger before the start of training camp, but is now ready go, Donovan reported.

On the subject of offseason acquisitions, Donovan has been pleased with the efforts put in by rookie forwards John Najafi, Robert Rawlins, Brandon Gaudette and Vince Cerone during training camp.

"John (Najafi) will score a lot as a first-year player," Donovan predicted.

"Robert (Rawlins) was the most impressive forward during our preseason. He's a tenacious checker, a fast skater and whenever he was on the ice we got possession of the puck.

"With Brandon (Gaudette) we weren't sure we were going to get him back from Sudbury's camp (Wolves, Ontario Hockey League). But we're glad he's back with us. He will add size and some scoring ability."

Another area which Donovan feels is another strong suit on the club is goaltending where Jon Hall returned to the fold after being acquired part way through last season from Collingwood and helped backstop the club to the semifinals.

## TWO EXPERIENCED GOALIES

Adding depth to that position was the recent acquisition of Knick Dawe, who played last season with the Aurora Tigers.

"We're fortunate to have a one-two punch from a goaltending point of view and experience," Donovan said. "Jon (Hall) has proven to be a top goalie at our level and Knick (Dawe) definitely won some games for Aurora last year that they shouldn't have won."

If the Spirit have any concerns it could be on defence where the only players with prior league experience include returnee Paul Geiger and Marko Brehli, a member of the Upper Canada Patriots last year.

What Donovan is hoping for is some quick maturation from newcomers Cole Hutchinson, Sean Power, Matt Heffernan and Ryan Kruss. Heffernan though, is expected to miss up to six games after incurring an untimely ankle injury during the preseason.

"We still would like to have a defenceman," Donovan conceded. "Last year we had more depth on our defence. This year we need our forwards and goaltending to carry us in the early part of the schedule while our defence gets some experience and hopefully will peak by the playoffs."

While hoping his club can be among the league's heavyweight contenders, Donovan said another important objective they hope to attain is to see their players take the steps necessary to enable them to play at the next level, whether it be in the OHL or at the collegiate level south of the border or in Canada.

"Our goal at the end of the year is for our kids to get noticed to play at higher levels and we have a number of guys who are capable of doing just that," Donovan said.

After Friday's road game in Huntsville, the Spirit will make its home debut against the Orangeville Flyers at the Stouffville Arena Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

## Radio station adding road games

Whistle Radio had plenty of listeners during last spring's Spirit Jr. A playoff run.

The community station is adding some road games to its home schedule of broadcasts this season. Go to [whistleradio.ca](http://whistleradio.ca) for schedule updates.

## Players wash cars for Terry Fox fund

The Spirit players will hold their annual car wash at Houston Ford to help raise money for the Terry Fox Foundation Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

## 9/11 remembered at Sunday's game

With the Spirit playing their home opener Sept. 11, the club will pay a special tribute in remembrance of the victims and heroes of this historic tragedy which took place 10 years ago to the day. Game time is 2:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena.

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## WALMART CORRECTION NOTICE

For our flyer effective Sept. 2 - 8/11.

Page 3: The photos of the Huggies items are not correct. They should be Huggies Pullups or Goodnites Mega Packs. Page 15: The description for the HP printer is not correct. It should be: HP 1000 Single Function Printer, #30050744. Page 17: The description for the BlackBerry is not correct. It should be TELUS BlackBerry Torch 9810.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused



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