

Lining up with brother a bonus for newest Spirit player

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Marc Stevens is just glad to be playing hockey these days.

Not just because he recently made his debut in the Ontario Junior Hockey league as a member of the Stouffville Spirit.

The 16-year-old, six-foot, one-inch, 185-pound younger brother of recently acquired Spirit forward Michael Stevens is elated to be on the ice — period.

Especially after he incurred an injury in late September while attending York Region's Hill Academy as a member of its under-16 prep hockey team.

Playing in a tournament in the United States, the Grade 11 Vaughan resident was the recipient of a hit.

The contact wasn't that overpowering and Stevens finished the game despite feeling some discomfort with his breathing.

He soldiered on to play in their next game.

But after that outing, he had trouble catching his breath.

When he tried to move his neck it felt like eggshells cracking.

At a local hospital, he was diagnosed with a punctured lower left lung.

"It was just a matter of perfect timing in which I was breathing at the same time I got hit," Stevens said. "When I got hit it burst a small hole in my lung."

He sat out six weeks on strict doctors' orders.

As a part of his recovery, Stevens began skating with Michael, who was still a member of the Georgetown Raiders. He'd soon be dealt along with goalkeeper Dan-

iel Mannella to the Spirit in exchange for former captain Alex Botten, goalkeeper Knick Dawe and forward Jacob Bauchmann.

It was during that time when Stevens found out he was going to join Michael with the Spirit.

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"I was skating with Georgetown with my brother and I got a call from Kenny (Burrows, Spirit co-owner and general manager) that they wanted me to sign with Stouffville," he said.

That was Dec. 1.

But there were complications, beyond getting medical clearance.

An Ontario Hockey Association ruling that came into effect this season prevents 1996-born players to sign with a team after Nov. 1.

Appealing the ruling with the OHA and Ontario Hockey Federation based on Stevens' injury, the Spirit were allowed to have him join their roster for the remainder of the season.

"It's been a great relief to be back on the ice and playing again," Stevens said.

A fifth-round draft pick of the Guelph Storm in the 2012 Ontario Hockey League draft, Stevens couldn't be happier than to be playing on the same competitive team

for the first time with Michael and on the same forward line.

Their parents get to watch them play together, too.

"To play with Michael is like a dream come true," Stevens said. "It's been great too, where he's got my back when I'm in trouble."

Also easing Stevens' transition has been the presence of rookie forward Chad Burrows, a teammate last season with the Vaughan Kings AAA minor midgets and his new GM's nephew.

During that campaign, Stevens amassed 18 points in 38 games.

"We had a good year last year with Vaughan and to go to Stouffville knowing Chad was there definitely made things easier for me," Stevens said.

Acknowledging the pace of the game in the OJHL is far greater than what he was accustomed to in minor hockey, Stevens hopes he can quickly adapt to his new surroundings so he can play in the OHL.

"I definitely hope that I can join the Storm next season," he said. "All throughout my injury and recovery period, they've been there for me."

Stevens is one of four 16-year-olds on a very young Spirit roster, which has eight 17-year-olds, a pair of 19-year-olds and no 20-year-olds since the trade with Georgetown. That's a far cry from the veteran Spirit team that won the OJHL championship last spring.

The Spirit, which played in Pickering last night and visits Trenton tonight, hosts Wellington tomorrow at 2:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena.



AMY DEROCHÉ/OJHL IMAGES PHOTO

Marc Stevens played in his first Jr. A hockey game for the Stouffville Spirit in Trenton Dec. 23. He was off skates for six weeks after puncturing a lung.

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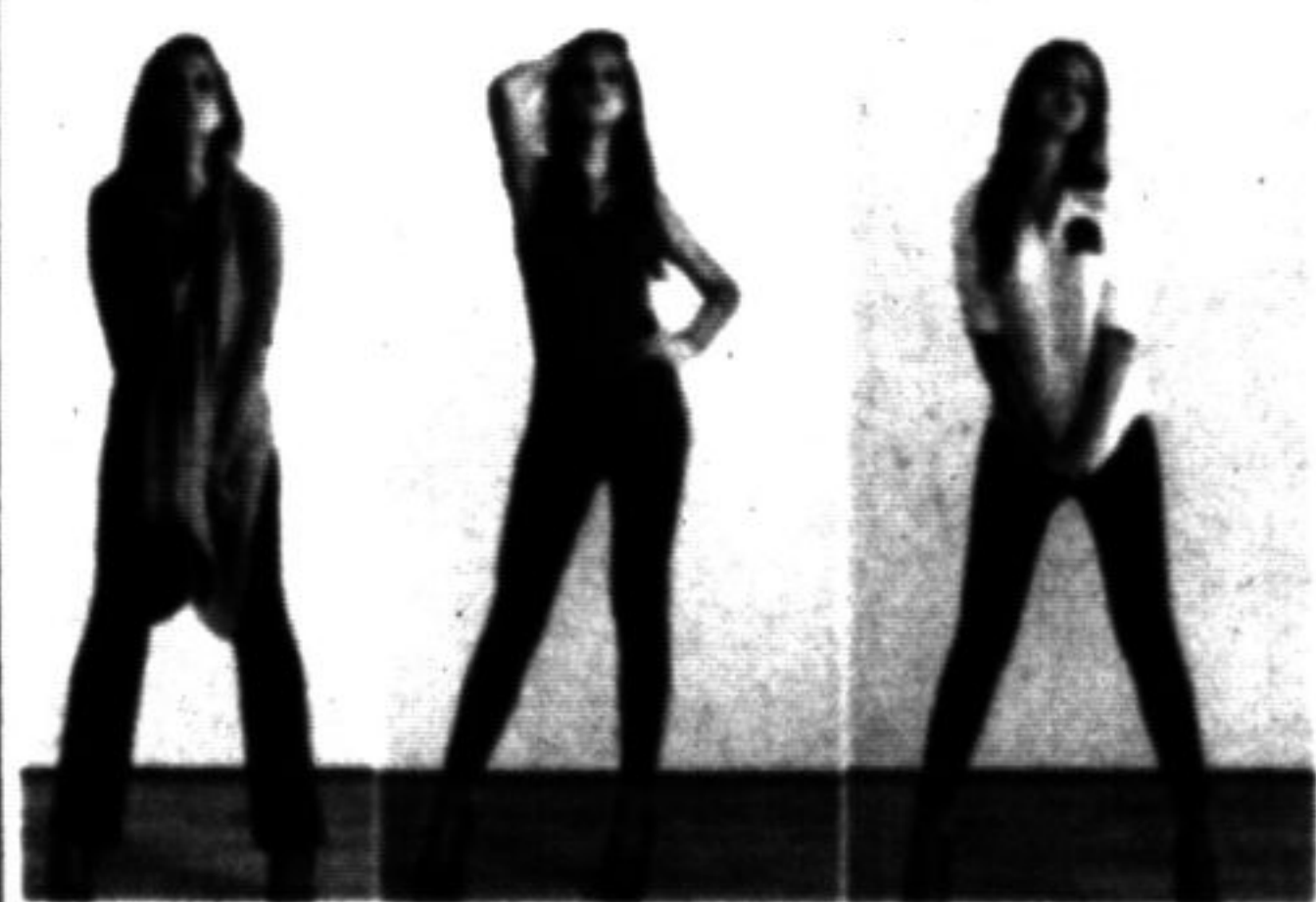
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