

Spirit happy to play role of spoiler before OJHL playoffs

LAST WEEK: Friday: Aurora Tigers 4 vs. Stouffville Spirit 2. Spirit record: 10 wins, two overtime wins, four shootout wins, one shootout loss, five overtime losses, 26 losses, 38 points. Fourth place in North Division and seven points behind Cobourg Cougars (45 points) for eighth and final playoff spot in North-East Conference, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Sunday: vs. Lindsay Muskies at Stouffville Arena, 2:30 p.m.

GAME NOTES: For the Stouffville Spirit, the effort was there when they played the Aurora Tigers in their Ontario Junior Hockey League game in Aurora Friday. Unfortunately, the only thing missing was a favourable outcome as the Spirit came out on the short end of a 4-2 decision against the Tigers and suffered their fourth straight setback. Not good timing for the Spirit since they are battling the Cobourg Cougars for the eighth and final playoff spot in the league's North-East Conference standings and were seven points behind as of Monday. Third-period power play goals by Robert Angiolella and Dylan Sikura broke a 2-2 tie to give the Tigers, who are battling the Newmarket Hurricanes for first place honours in the North Division, the two points. Zack MacArthur and Matt Andreacchi scored first-period goals in a 58-second span to stake the Tigers to a 2-0 lead through the opening 20 minutes. However, the Spirit bounced back in the second period to tie the score on goals by Michael Morgan and Matthew Dunlop entering the third period. Braydon Banitsiotis started the game in goal for the Spirit before giving way to Daniel Mannella entering the second period. The Tigers outshot the Spirit 36-22.

INSIDER: The Ontario Junior Hockey League launched its second annual Fan Favourite Award balloting Monday. The award was presented for the first time last season and has OJHL fans voting online to choose their favourite OJHL star.

All fans will be allowed to submit players' names in an online form found on the home page of the OJHL website, www.ojhl.ca. The winner will be the player who receives the most submissions (votes) through the course of the online voting. Voting began Monday and will run throughout the playoffs, ending March 31 at 5 p.m. The winner will be unveiled prior to Game 1 of the OJHL championship series during the third annual OJHL awards ceremony. The award will be presented to the winning player by a selected fan from the winning player's city, on-ice, during the award ceremony prior to game one of the OJHL championship series.

Last season during the award's inaugural year of competition, online voting saw almost 27,000 votes cast for 198 different OJHL players, representing all 27 member clubs, with former Spirit captain Andrew Doyle being named the inaugural recipient. Doyle is in his first sea-

JR. A NOTEBOOK

son at the University of Toronto

Among former Spirit graduates making news, Matt Neal collected a pair of assists to help the Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute Engineers edge Cornell 3-2 Friday. The sophomore is tied as the club's third-leading scorer with four goals and 12 assists. Stouffville resident Chris Porter scored a goal in American International College's 3-1 loss against the University of Connecticut Huskies Friday. Porter's goal, his fifth of the season, had tied the score in the second period before the Huskies rallied to win the game. Currently in his freshman year, Porter has five goals and six assists in 22 games. Stouffville resident Paul Geiger collected one assist in Clarkson University's 5-1 road win over Harvard Friday. Geiger is in his freshman year at Clarkson along with fellow Spirit graduates Christian Finch and Christian Powers.

The name Steel should be familiar for goaltending fans in Stouffville. Brad Steel played the position through junior. His son, 19-year-old Tyler Steel has accepted an NCAA scholarship starting next season at Brown University. Steel is in his third British Columbia Hockey League season with the Merritt Centennials after establishing career bests in 2011-12 with a 15-11-1-0 record, 2.60 goals-against-average, .916 save percentage and three shutouts in 29 games. His grandparents, Ray and Joanne Steel, live in Stouffville.

David Morley is having a fine season with the St. Cloud State University Huskies men's hockey team in Minnesota. The 22-year-old Richmond Hill resident, who is bouncing back from a concussion, earned a share of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association's Rookie of the Week honours last month. His grandparents, Wilf and Nelda Morley, live in Stouffville. He played against the Spirit for the Aurora Tigers.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: A disconsolate Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin felt the difference in Friday's game was special teams play. Especially since the Tigers capitalized on two odd-man advantages in the third period to score. The Spirit, meanwhile, failed to score on the power play, including one situation in which they had a two-man advantage early in the second period.

"We had to take a couple of penalties, they weren't bad ones but they (Aurora) scored. They're an experienced team.

"And at the same time we had a five-on-three situation and couldn't score," Perrin said.

In pulling Banitsiotis after one period, Perrin felt he needed to make a change after he allowed what he felt was a soft goal.

With nine days off before taking to the ice to face the Lindsay Muskies at the Stouffville Arena Sunday, Perrin intends to utilize that downtime to work on things with his youthful charges that need to be refined.

"We will just be working on things we need to work on," he said.

Despite being mired in a slump and with the regular season schedule rapidly winding down, Perrin hasn't given up the ship yet in terms of trying to make a late-season run at a postseason berth.

"We still have a chance to make the playoffs," he said. "Basically we want to make the league aware of us for the rest of this season and spoil someone's plans for the playoffs and to serve notice for next season."

The Spirit have won the last two meetings with the Muskies, with both determined during a shootout session. Perrin though, acknowledged their upcoming game against a team jockeying for playoff positioning, won't be easy.

"Lindsay's a good team on paper and they have plenty of veterans," he said. "What we have to do is to get them off of their game."

—Michael Hayakawa with Jim Mason

Matthew Dunlop of the Stouffville Spirit scored during the team's loss in Aurora Friday. The Spirit is at home to Lindsay Sunday.



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