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## Spirit GM happy with maturing youngsters

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Based on what Mr. Burrows and Mr. Werek observed during the season though, they remained steadfast there's light at the end of the tunnel when the 2013-14 campaign commences.

"I don't know if disappointed is the right word," Mr. Burrows said. "We played in a tough division and conference and being a young team we felt (missing the playoffs) could happen."

"But we've got a good crew coming back. The 17-year-olds on the team improved a lot during the season. Obviously this is about next year. It was a good learning curve."

Ditto down the hall. "Truthfully I thought we would have a down year," added Mr. Werek. "We lost a huge number of key guys and we could have had a decent year if we kept some of our returning veterans, but Kenny was right in retooling our team for the next couple of years."

"I wouldn't say I was disappointed. I'm looking forward to seeing how the team will be next year."

With the nature of junior hockey being cyclical — most players come and go after a year or two — Mr. Werek said measuring a team's success through the wins and losses is deceiving.

"When I first got involved with

the team (in the late 1990s), every year was so emotional, but you learn more about the league and how things go. Sure, you love to win, but what this league's about is to develop kids to play at the next level," he said.

The season concluded Thursday when the Spirit hosted the first-place Aurora Tigers and suffered a 4-1 loss to finish fourth in the North Division at the Stouffville Arena.

Their record was 18-37. Mr. Burrows pinpointed the club's struggles this season to its overall inexperience.

### RECORD OF 18-37

Even during the early segment of the season when the club occupied first place in the North Division for a brief time, Mr. Burrows acknowledged he was surprised at their ability to overachieve.

"At key points of the season, we couldn't finish off games properly on some nights," he said. "With one veteran line and everyone else being rookies it's hard to have three solid lines."

"Even when we were doing well early in the year we just scraped by. We weren't a dominating team."

"I believe when you have a bunch of kids that came off a good year like we did a year ago, a lot of them have high expectations. That's fine, but some of those expectations were unrealistic."

If the OJHL still had 37 teams and 32 qualified for the postseason, Mr. Burrows said there would have been no doubt the Spirit would have been playing in the second season.

"Our conference was tough night in and night out. You've got to look around the conference and see how tough it was. Whitby had 13 or 14 kids back from last year's team that we met in the final. Newmarket had around 10 guys back and that's a lot of kids to have back. And Aurora was a solid team," he said.

The Spirit team that finished the season had four players on it from the title team of 10 months ago.

At the same time, with fewer teams in the league, Mr. Burrows conceded it presented a further challenge for him to make a trade that might have bolstered the roster and added a few more wins.

"The trades weren't out there," he said.

Mr. Burrows liked how his club began to develop good habits, which bodes well for next season.

"I liked our overall team speed, that was evident as the year went on and the fact that we didn't quit all year. We played every game hard. Just on some nights we did not get good results," he said.

From an individual perspective, Mr. Burrows was pleased with the development of several rookies including goalkeeper Daniel Mannello and defencemen Josh Carrick

and Nathanael Halbert.

They played in the OJHL Prospects Game during the Christmas break in Wellington.

Whether all three players return next season though, remains up in the air, Mr. Burrows said.

With no postseason action to look forward to, Mr. Burrows is already looking ahead to next season and has taken immediate measures by beating the bushes for potential prospects for the Spirit's spring rookie camp at the Stouffville Arena May 3.

### MEETING WITH COACHES

They'll need at least five new forwards and a couple of rearguards for starters.

As well, Mr. Burrows said he will have subsequent meetings with head coach Jeff Perrin and his assistants to see what direction the club will take.

"Not making the playoffs is something you don't want to do. But I'm comfortable with where we're at," Mr. Burrows said.

In Thursday's finale, the Spirit trailed Aurora 1-0 after one period and 2-0 through two before Stouffville resident Daryl Thomson scored early in the third period to cut their deficit.

But the Tigers got two more goals, including one into an empty net, before regulation time expired.

Each team had 30 shots on net

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