

SPORTS

Lightning hits, Clippers struck down at OHF juvenile championships

BY JIM MASON
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After a year of skating through the rigours of Jr. A hockey, Dillon Duprey just wanted to have some fun.

The Vaughan resident was with the now-defunct Brampton Capitals of the Ontario Junior Hockey League in 2011-12.

"This year, I just wanted to play with my buddies," he said at centre ice of the Stouffville Arena Sunday.

Ball cap on backwards and gold medal hanging over his Tampa Bay "Bolts" knock-off jersey, the 19-year-old had just led Etobicoke's West Mall Lightning to the Ontario Hockey Federation AAA juvenile championship.

The Lightning's unlikely run to the provincial title was completed with a dominant 4-1 win over the Ajax Knights in the final.

The Lightning finished the round-robin portion of the five team tourney in fourth place. Ajax

was third.

Both completed upsets of sorts in Sunday morning's semifinals, the Lightning blanking the first-place and host Stouffville Clippers (2-0-2) 3-0 and Ajax knocking off pre-tournament faves and defending champs Toronto's Humberview Huskies, 3-2 in double overtime.

The Clippers may have shot their bolt Saturday afternoon when they, too, beat the Huskies - they of the incredible 138-10-8 record the last two seasons - 6-5 in a thriller.

The Clippers, who lost the Ontario Minor Hockey Association title to Ajax but got into the tourney as hosts, also defeated Whitby 4-3 in the round robin and tied Ajax 2-2 and West Mall 3-3.

The Clippers lost in the semis in every tournament but one this year.

"We had a really good season," said coach and tourney chairperson Andy Cartwright. "We just ended up a little short of where we wanted to go."

West Mall was winless in its

first three games, including an 8-1 spanking courtesy of Humberview Saturday morning, before beating Whitby 4-0 that afternoon to scrape into the medal round.

"We weren't feeling very good about ourselves here Saturday morning," said Duprey, as his teammates celebrated to Lynyrd Skynyrd's Sweet Home Alabama in their dressing room.

Duprey, who tied with Michael Chemello of the Huskies and Bret Twizell of the Clippers for tourney scoring title with eight points each, was named the event's top forward. Teammate Taylor McDonald was top goaltender and Ajax's Scott Desroches best defenceman.

Clippers Lloyd Davis and Mike Vitelli had five points apiece during the weekend.

The Lightning allowed only one goal - a late one in the final - in their last three games.

"It's a special group of guys," said West Mall coach Matthew Maida, first cousin of Our Lady Peace front

man Raine Maida. "They're not as talented as some of the other teams - we lost 12-3 earlier this season to Humberview. But they find a way to win when it counts. And they caught lightning in a bottle here."

Humberview went 36-0-0 in the 10-team Greater Toronto Hockey League's regular season and dominated second-place West Mall in the playoff championship series.

There's history between the two Toronto teams, even "bad blood," as Duprey put it.

That's understandable.

Players from both teams took to Twitter after the tourney. A West Mall player congratulating Humberview on its "participant medals" was, understandably not well received.

Maida and Duprey, both relative newcomers to juvenile AAA, or under-21 as they call it south of Steeles Avenue, are impressed by the brand, even if it's not relevant outside of the GTA, home to all five teams in the provincewide event.

Northern Ontario hasn't sent an entry in years. Juvenile hockey is played elsewhere in the province, but only at lower levels.

"Juvenile hockey?" said Maida. "When I played junior (in Thornhill) you didn't even think of juvenile."

The Lightning's 43-19-6 record included games at schools in Michigan and Florida.

"(Coming from Jr. A) I didn't expect the quality to be this good," said Duprey, who hopes to play college hockey for a club team in the States next season. "There are some good players on all these teams. Just look at Chemello on Humberview."

Cartwright and his staff are turning the team over to Angelo Varsamis. Six Clippers will graduate.

Tourney organizers received heavy praise from participants, which Cartwright passed on to an army of volunteers, including team parents and several students from Stouffville District Secondary School.

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