

## Blueliner lost to Quebec league

Nathanael Halbert had every intention of returning to the Stouffville Spirit for the upcoming Ontario Junior Hockey League season.

But the 17-year-old Richmond Hill resident who toiled on the blueline for the Spirit last year and for part of their championship season two seasons ago, received an offer that was too enticing to turn down.

It came from the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, who he signed with Friday.

"I was hesitant to do it at first. I really thought I would be back in Stouffville," Halbert, who amassed three goals and 10 assists in 48 regular games last season, said. "But this (offer) was a good option for me."

The Spirit will receive a development fee from Blainville-Boisbriand.

Halbert suspects he was scouted in April at the College Cup showcase tournament where he played for an entry directed by Pat Arbour, the South Central Coyotes AAA midget coach who operated a gymnasium Halbert attended.

Al Mason, a scout with Blainville-Boisbriand, contacted his superiors about Halbert, who attended the club's summer camp and left a good impression.

In an effort to make sure his final decision was the right one, Halbert returned to Richmond Hill late last week to talk things over with his parents. He had until Satur-

day to make a decision.

He promptly returned to play in an exhibition game against Gatineau last weekend.

When Halbert joined the Spirit, his goal was to try and procure a college scholarship offer.

"Even up to three to four days ago it was my plan, to try and get a college scholarship offer. But I didn't have anything going in the NCAA," he said.

At the same time, the allure of performing on a larger stage was enticing to Halbert, who was ignored by Ontario Hockey League clubs during his draft year.

"It took a lot of persuasion to change my way of thinking," he said. "(Blainville-Boisbriand) offered so much. The Quebec Major Junior Hockey League is a fantastic league and the organization is great.

"And missing out on the OHL draft, you forget about the OHL, but you always have a dream of playing in front of large crowds every night."

Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin felt he was going to lose Halbert upon hearing he would attend Blainville-Boisbriand's summer camp.

Perrin acknowledged there will be a void on the blueline.

"Sure, it's a loss for us. But it's good for him and for us since our mandate is to move guys onto the next ladder and whoever takes Nathan's spot we hope to see move on as well," Perrin said.

— Michael Hayakawa

# Unsigned rookies draw Spirit coach's attention

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA  
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When the Stouffville Spirit launched their Ontario Junior Hockey League pre-season schedule against the host Pickering Panthers Friday, head coach Jeff Perrin offered one bit of valuable pre-game advice to those hoping to garner one of 23 regular-season roster spots.

Just play to the best of your abilities, the second-year Spirit head coach suggested.

Taking into account his entire roster for the game was comprised of untested rookies and Perrin has yet to install his system of play, that's about what the first game – a 6-2 Spirit win – was all about.

"The main thing was we wanted from those who played was to show us (Spirit coaching staff) what they had. The guys really haven't been taught anything yet," Perrin said.

"I was pleased, they played well, they competed hard and they kept their composure when Pickering stated to play a little crazy."

While pleased with the overall effort, a couple of players took Perrin's advice to heart and might have solidified their chances to garner a spot on the this year's edition of the Spirit.

Most notably, Perrin revealed, were a pair of unsigned forwards – Mac Flewelling and Carter Cummings.

## FOUR-POINT GAME

A member of the Stayner Siskins Jr. C club last season, Flewelling scored twice and collected two assists in the Spirit's win over the Panthers.

"I didn't know anything about him," Perrin said of the 18-year-old, five-foot, seven-inch Barrie native who had 14 goals and 17 assists in 31 games last season.

Playing two games last season with the Spirit as a call-up from the South Central Coyotes AAA midgets, Cummings, 17, contributed a pair of goals.

"He played a couple of games with us last

year and we knew what we was all about," Perrin said of the Richmond Hill native.

Konrad Piorkowski also contributed a goal and three assists while Liam Folkes added the other marker for the Spirit, who held a 1-0 lead after one period and padded it to 4-1 through two.

Liam Conway, from the Cleveland area, and Brandon Klerer split time in goal for the Spirit, who outshot the Panthers 37-20.

## NEIL CONWAY'S BROTHER

Conway is the younger brother of Neil Conway, who played in the Spirit net as a 15-year-old in 2003-04. Neil, who won a CIS title with the Saint Mary's Huskies in 2010, played for the Quad City Mallards of the Central league last season.

With the players given the weekend off to savour the win, the Spirit returned to the Stouffville Arena ice Monday.

Perrin began the process of paring down their roster by releasing six players.

It's the worst part of his job during training camp.

"It definitely hurts when you have to cut kids because a lot of times you're releasing guys who can play at our level," he said.

Further roster reductions are expected after this weekend's games.

Those include a road tilt against the defending league champion St. Michael's College Buzzers in Toronto tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. followed by home games against the Whitby Fury Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and the Panthers Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

Perrin said he intends to dress his returning veterans and ensure that each player sees ice time in at least two of those tilts.

With some Spirit players attending Ontario Hockey League camps that open next week, he will have to keep enough bodies around to fill a roster for their remaining preseason games.

For more on the Spirit, go to [stouffvillespirit.com](http://stouffvillespirit.com)

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