

Captain plans to change culture in Spiritland

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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If it isn't broken, there's no need to fix it.

In the case of the Stouffville Spirit, they did not have to make any thought-provoking decisions when naming their captain for the 2013-14 Ontario Junior Hockey League regular season.

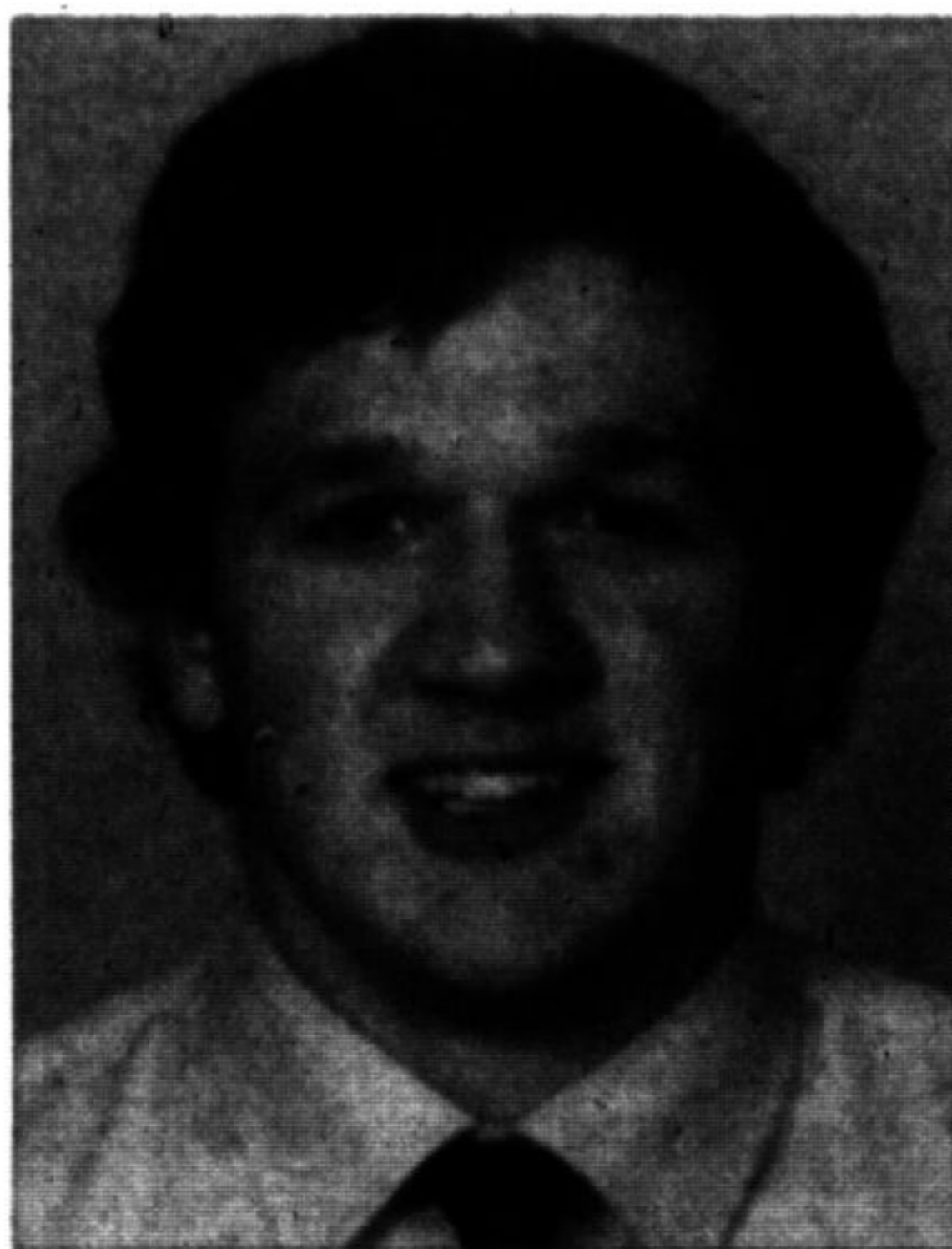
Especially since the player who had the C on his jersey last season in Matt Heffernan has returned to anchor the Spirit's blueline this fall.

The Spirit officially anointed the six-foot, 205-pound, 19-year-old London, Ont. native as captain for a second term Monday.

Defenceman Robert Powers will once again serve as an assistant captain along with second-year forwards Marc Stevens and Daryl Thomson.

Named captain just after last season's trade deadline, Heffernan was the Spirit's third team captain of the year when he succeeded Alex Botten, who was dealt to the Georgetown Raiders.

Botten in turn had replaced



MATT HEFFERNAN: Captain will lead Spirit in Jr. A home opener Thursday against Milton.

Tommy Tsicos, who began last year as the Spirit's captain.

Having served as the club's assistant captain prior to his promotion last year, Heffernan was honoured to have the C sewn onto his jersey.

Acknowledging the captaincy role was a dream come true that arrived a little earlier than anticipated, Heffernan said. To resume the position this season was something he wasn't tak-

ing for granted until the official word came down.

"I didn't know if (being named captain for a second straight year) was a given, but if I was coming back I figured I'd be wearing the C," he said. "It's certainly nice to be named captain again officially."

The third-year defenceman's main priority will be to change the dressing room culture.

Especially since this year's team possesses a little more maturity than the one that finished last season out of the playoffs.

Heffernan, a rookie on the Spirit's 2012 OJHL championship team, hopes to instil a positive attitude where it's expected they can win any game they play this season.

"Last year, we were so young and had just a few veterans. There wasn't a lot expected of us. It was really a developmental year and a growing period for our team," he said. "What we have to do though is to change the culture in our dressing room where we can create a win-at-all-cost atmosphere."

Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin said the decision was really a no brainer.

"He was our captain last year, he's a good leader who works hard and is a good team guy," he said. "He came into camp in great physical condition. There was no need to change things."

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Amassing two goals and 15 assists in 52 regular season games last season and with two years of Jr. A eligibility remaining, Heffernan hopes his performance on the ice will entice a major university south of the border to offer him a package to continue his education and play hockey.

Should the Spirit perform well as a team this season, Heffernan remained confident the recognition will come his way.

"We have to try and strive for team goals," he said. "If you have a good team, the chances are the personal goals will take care of themselves."

The Spirit opens the regular season at home to the Milton Icehawks Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena.

Brian Perrin returns to Newmarket

There is once again a sense of familiarity behind the Newmarket Hurricanes' bench.

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident Brian Perrin is to return to the team as general manager and head coach tonight when the Hurricanes open their Ontario Junior Hockey League season against the host Whitby Fury. It is a bit of an odd entrance for the veteran coach, who sat out last season after his dismissal from the Hurricanes following the 2011-12 season.

The former head coach of the Stouffville Spirit concedes it will take some time to sort out his roster inherited from former GM Maurice Catenacci, who conducted training camp without a head coach in place and stepped down after Wednesday's transfer of power. Perrin brings along his former assistant coaches Steve Sedore, ex of the Spirit, and Kent Hutton.

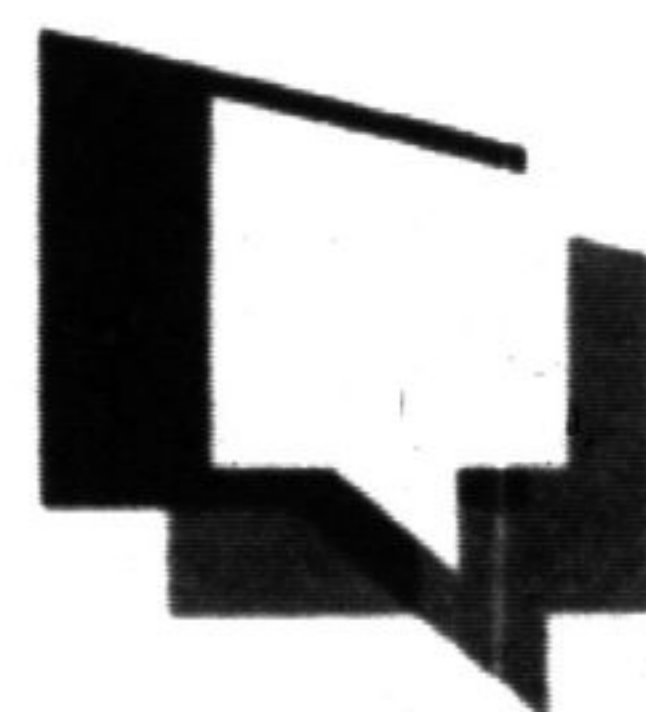
Last season, Perrin's replacement, Justin Peca, guided the Hurricanes to the league final before losing to the St. Michael's Buzzers in a seven-game series. It remains unclear exactly when Peca was dismissed during the off-season, although indications are owner Andrew Dunin ordered the deed immediately following the playoffs.

Perrin's previous stint as GM/head coach in Newmarket started partway into the 2006-07 season after the Hurricanes got off to a terrible start and ultimately produced the franchise's only sub-.500 season since the 1991-92 season. He went on to oversee five straight winning seasons, finishing with 40 wins twice and below 30 victories just once in that stretch.

Perrin's brother, Jeff, is entering his second season as head coach of the Spirit.

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- John Cudmore



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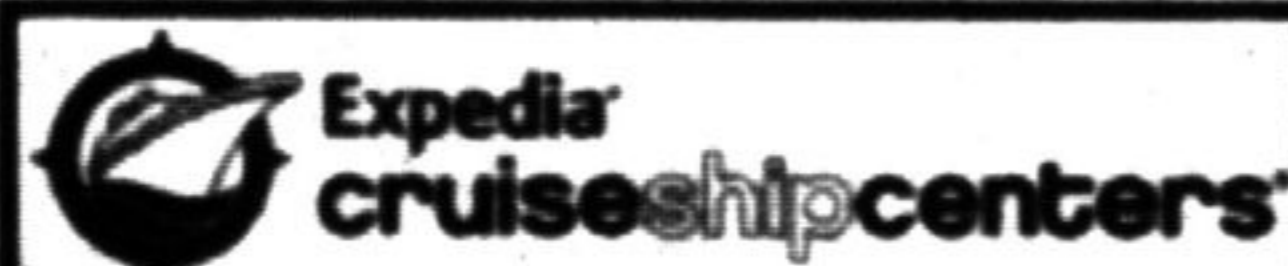
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