

JR. A NOTEBOOK: Home tonight, Sunday

Spirit still searching for winning combinations

LAST WEEK: Friday: Wellington Dukes 4 vs. Stouffville Spirit 0. Saturday: Kingston Voyageurs 4 vs. Spirit 3. Spirit record: one win, one shootout win, four losses, four points. Fifth place in North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Today: vs. Burlington Cougars at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m. Sunday vs. Georgetown Raiders at Stouffville Arena, 2:30 p.m.

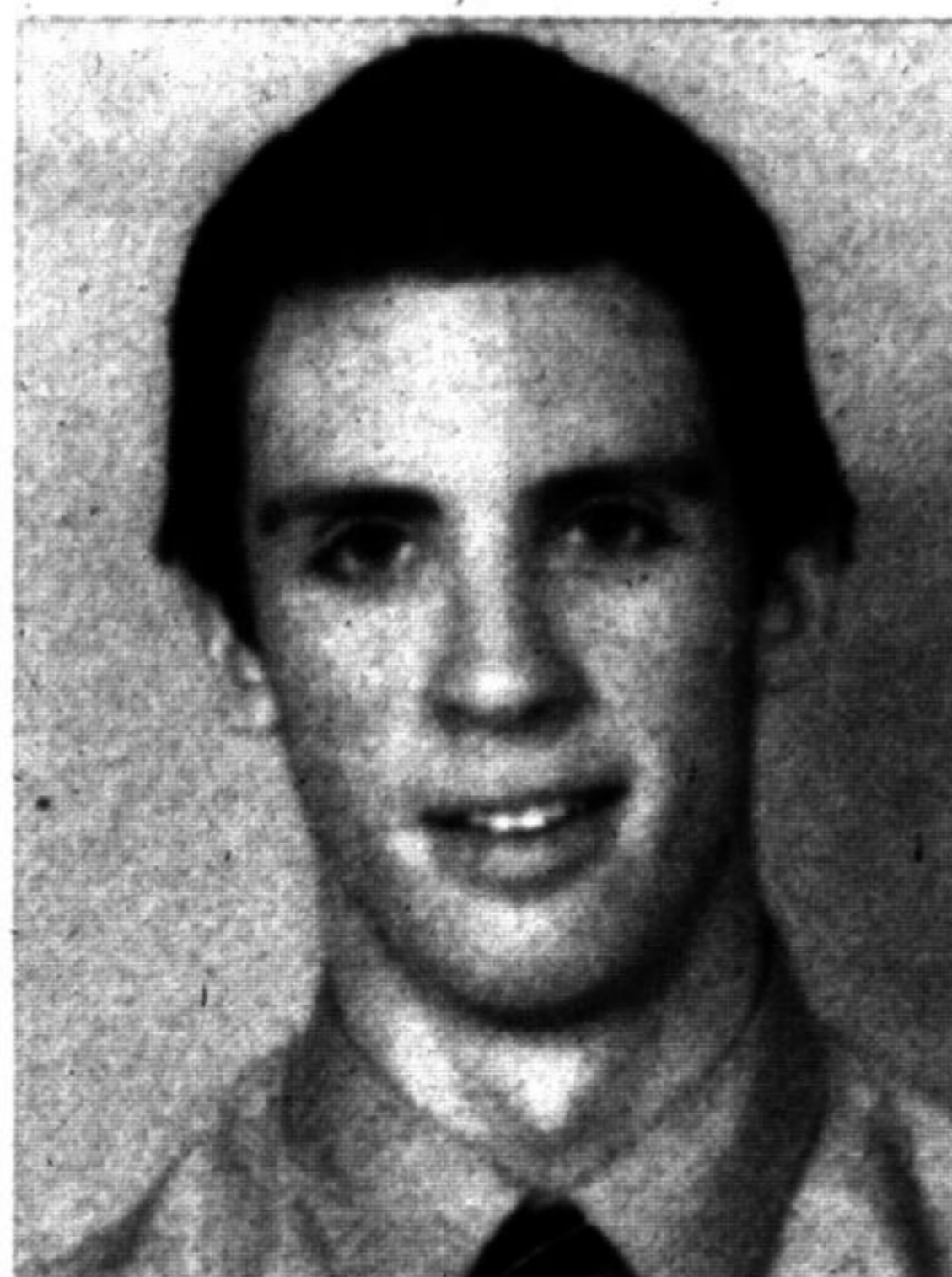
GAME NOTES: Entering the OJHL regular season, Stouffville Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin was hoping his club could set the tone for what might lie ahead by getting off to a good start. While the regular season is still in its early stages, the Spirit have struggled a bit but of the starting gate and currently occupy the cellar in the North Division after dropping a pair of road tilts against the Wellington Dukes 4-0 Friday and Kingston Voyageurs 4-3 in Oakville the following day during the OJHL's Governor's Showcase Weekend that was attended by an assortment of U.S. and Canadian collegiate coaches and OHL scouts.

Against Wellington, the Spirit trailed 1-0 after one period and 3-0 through two. Rookie netminder Tim Bester made his second straight start for the Spirit. During the game, he handled 29 of 33 shots. The

Spirit directed 26 shots on Dukes' netminder Adam Wood, who recorded his first shutout of the season.

In Saturday's contest, the Voyageurs took a 1-0 lead on the first of three power-play goals by Maxum Pitre through the opening 20 minutes. After Spirit captain Matt Heffernan tied the game with an extra strength goal early in the second period, the Voyageurs capitalized on penalties taken by Heffernan and rookie defence-man Kyler Challis near the midway point to score with a two-man advantage. With Challis still serving his minor, the Voyageurs potted another power-play goal to take a 3-1 lead. Before the period concluded, the Voyageurs lit the red light with their first even-strength tally of the game to take a 4-1 advantage. But the Spirit cut their deficit with a power-play goal by Robert Powers. With just under five minutes remaining in the third period the Spirit got back to within a goal when Peyton Backus scored on the power play. But that would be as close as the Spirit would get before regulation time expired. Spirit netminder Daniel Mannella stopped 27 of 31 shots. The Spirit put 45 shots on the Voyageurs' net.

Ontario Junior Hockey League **INSIDER:**



ROBERT POWERS: Defenceman scores at showcase for goal-challenged Stouffville Spirit.

On the injury front, the Spirit saw the return of forward Justin Wain on the weekend. Forward Daryl Thomson (knee-cap) remains on the sidelines for an indefinite period.

In the league statistical category, Spirit netminder Daniel Mannella had the 10th-best goals against average as of Monday

with a 2.55 mark in four appearances. In the team categories through Monday, the Spirit were 13th in penalty killing percentage in the league at 80 per cent and were ninth in power play percentage at 20.41 per cent.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "I'm a little concerned about our slow start," Perrin acknowledged.

Reflecting on his club's latest woes, Perrin attributed it to several factors. Among them, he said was his club's inability to generate any offence, especially during even-strength situations.

"We have to be able to score when we're playing five on five," he said. "Against Wellington, anyone could have played in goal for them and won the game. He didn't have one tough save to make. We just didn't compete, we didn't go to the net, to the dirty areas or shoot the puck. It was disappointing. I don't know why. Maybe the guys were looking ahead to Saturday. It was unacceptable."

While far more pleased with his club's effort against Kingston that saw the forwards go more aggressively to the opposing net and score some goals, Perrin felt their penalty killing let them down as evidenced in failing to kill off three shorthanded situations in

four situations they were faced with during the game.

"Sure, a couple of penalties we took I thought were questionable. But when you take penalties you've got to be able to kill them off," he said.

Perrin intends to continue to experiment with his line combinations until he finds something that clicks.

Another potential cure is in playing their next two games at the Stouffville Arena starting tonight against a Burlington Cougars team they defeated in a shootout on the road, and then the Georgetown Raiders Sunday.

Acknowledging these two games won't be easy, Perrin said the key is for his club to show some intensity.

"We've got to compete harder as a team, everyone. There's no weak games in this league or any sure wins.

"If there's any positive, if you look at the standings in our division, everyone's relatively in the same boat in our division where no one's running away right now."

For more on the Spirit, log on to: www.stouffvillespirit.com or catch up on Twitter

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