

Ex-OHLer finds scoring touch in Stouffville

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When the Stouffville Spirit acquired forward Andres Kopstals in a trade with the Toronto Lakeshore Patriots along with defenceman Jack O'Hara in exchange for veteran defenceman Robert Powers, the Ontario Junior Hockey League club hoped he could inject some life into a struggling offence.

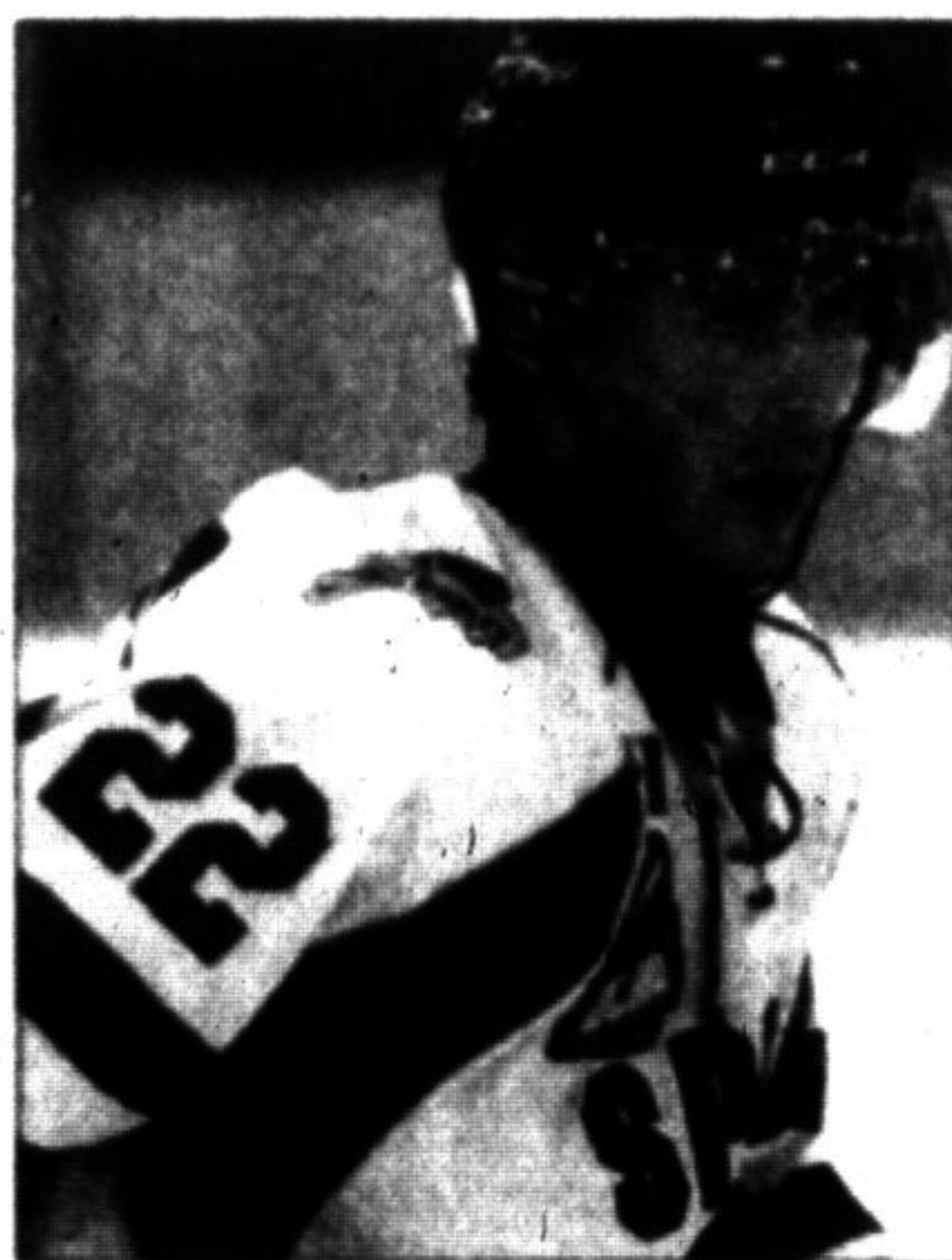
Not to mention bolster their penalty killing unit, which was surrendering a few more goals than they would have liked.

Those requests could easily exert some undue added pressure on some players.

Not so with the 19-year-old Kopstals. In fact, his presence with the Spirit has been nothing short of a blessing.

With Kopstals on the Spirit's roster for their last two contests, both of which resulted in victories, he's amassed three goals, one of which was a shorthanded effort in a 6-3 road win over the Toronto Junior Canadiens Saturday, and two assists that came in his debut in a 2-1 overtime win over the St. Michael's Buzzers one week ago.

Those numbers more than double the one goal and one assist he compiled in six games as a mem-



ANDRES KOPSTALS: New Spirit sniper hopes to play hockey at a Canadian university.

ber of the Patriots and two assists he earned while toiling in nine games with the Mississauga Steelheads of the Ontario Hockey League earlier this season.

"I haven't been here (in Stouffville) for more than a week but so far it's been good. I couldn't ask for a better start," Kopstals said. "I was able to contribute and make a difference out there. Things couldn't have gone any better."

He was caught off guard when informed by the Patriots manage-

ment that he was going to Stouffville. Kopstals insisted no extra weight was placed on his shoulders by a club currently battling for a playoff spot.

"I try not to put too much pressure on myself," he said. "But in a way it's good because you're being relied on."

"When I came to Stouffville they (club management) were relying on me to supply some offence and I was happy with that."

Especially since there was little opportunity for him to make an offensive contribution while with the Patriots, a team sitting atop the South Division standings. Same deal with the Mississauga Steelheads.

"They (Patriots) have a great team with a lot of top scorers and guys who are good offensively. You can only have so many guys touch the puck," he said. "When I was with Mississauga (Steelheads) I had a defensive role and was used to kill penalties."

"To come to Stouffville was a bit of a change for me. But it's been fun to score."

In explaining the good start he's off to with the Spirit, Kopstals said much of it can be attributed to developing an immediate chemistry with his linemates that include

fellow rookies Graham Pickard, who also joined the club at the same time after playing with the Winkler Flyers of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, and Michael Carcone.

"Michael (Carcone) is a highly skilled guy who thinks the game and Graham (Pickard) is a guy who is also a skilled player," he said. "To play on a line with these guys has been good. I hope we can keep this going."

Citing his goal in the short term is to try and help the Spirit qualify for the postseason, something they failed to do last season, Kopstals hopes he can parlay his resurrected on-ice career into playing at a Canadian university.

He's taking courses to bolster his grades to gain acceptance into a university while working part time.

At the same time though, he's kept a door open should the Steelheads make a call if they are down a few bodies, as they've retained his OHL rights.

"To play in the OHL was an excellent experience and I'd do it again if the chance came up," he said. "You never hope for someone to get hurt or if a couple of players got suspended. But I feel I could be relied on if I went back because I have that experience."

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