

Two serious knee injuries can't keep Stouffville native down

No 'quit' in Daryl Thomson's game

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The word quit is not a part of Daryl Thomson's vocabulary.

In fact, he disdains it with a passion and refuses to think of it.

Especially when it was suggested to the Stouffville resident he should stop playing competitive hockey after incurring two separate knee injuries.

The first of which took place two seasons ago when, as a member of the Trenton Golden Hawks, Thomson took a knee on knee hit and broke his right femur.

Dealt to the Stouffville Spirit part way through last season where he returned to active duty, Thomson was looking forward to building on a year in which he amassed seven goals and eight assists in 31 games.

But in preparing for this season, the 19-year-old forward broke his right knee cap during a preseason game and was out indefinitely.

While doctors informed him it wouldn't be at least until January when he could be back in action, Thomson's perseverance enabled him to join his Spirit teammates on the ice a little sooner than anticipated when they played host to his former Golden Hawks' club at the Stouffville Arena just prior to the Christmas holiday break.

"When I broke my femur I was told I wouldn't play again," Thomson said. "I

said to myself 'that wouldn't happen.' I battled through that and proved people wrong.

"And when I broke my knee cap I said to myself 'wow, what's going on.' It went through my mind and I wondered if the hockey gods were on my side or not? Everyone said I wouldn't come back.

"But I'm back. And I'm not giving up."

To get back on the ice for a game, Thomson said it was a moment he was waited patiently for, yet was anxious to do.

'NOT GIVING UP'

To that he was quick to praise his trainers in assisting him through the process of making a full recovery.

"It's a great feeling," he said. "It's been a long time. It was definitely frustrating to be sitting out for as long as I had to when I heard my kneecap was broken. But the trainers that I had pushed me hard. My goal was to get back in the lineup early."

While Thomson felt good about his return, so too are the Spirit, as his presence in their lineup provided a bit of a spark after earning a hard-earned point during their 4-3 shootout loss to the Golden Hawks.

With Thomson employed on a line with Tyson Bruce and Justin Wain, the trio helped the Spirit overcome a two-goal deficit that began just past the midway point in the second period when Bruce

lit the red light to get them back to within a goal and set the stage for their game-tying marker in the third period to force overtime.

"Considering I hadn't played in three months I thought we clicked pretty well," Thomson said of their forward unit. "We were getting some stuff done on the ice and we got a goal. That was encouraging."

Putting the past behind him, Thomson said his focus is now on trying to make whatever contribution he can to help the Spirit move up the North Division standings and make a push for the postseason.

"I've watched this club from the start of the season and I've seen a big improvement with our roster," he said. "The new guys that we picked up (Jack O'Hara, Andres Kopstals and Graham Pickard) are good guys in the dressing room and they fit in well. The team is now starting to click and we've got plenty of time left to make a run for a playoff spot."

Keeping his fingers crossed that he can avoid any further physical setbacks, Thomson is also setting his sights on trying to parlay his on-ice skills into a collegiate scholarship south of the border.

With one more year of tier two Jr. A eligibility remaining, Thomson feels he can attain that goal and isn't about to give up.

"That's the goal now, and to stay healthy," he said.



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Daryl Thomson has suffered leg injuries in the past two years and been told he wouldn't play again.

Hot goaltender has Spirit talking OJHL playoffs again

LAST WEEK: Friday: Stouffville Spirit 3 vs. Lindsay Muskies 0. Spirit record: 12 wins, one overtime win, one shootout win, one overtime loss, two shootout losses, 17 losses, 31 points. Fourth place in North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League

COMING UP: Today: vs. Pickering Panthers at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m. Sunday: vs. Buffalo Jr. Sabres at Stouffville Arena, 2:30 p.m.

GAME NOTES: Good goaltending can take a club a long ways. For the Stouffville Spirit, they hope Daniel Mannella's performance between the pipes over their last few contests is a sign of good things down the road in pursuit of earning a berth in the postseason.

Acquired part way through last season in a trade with the Georgetown Raiders, Mannella recorded his first shutout this season after stopping every shot directed at him in a 3-0 road win over the Lindsay Muskies Friday. For the Spirit, the win was their second in as many days and moved them to within four points with three games in hand of the Newmarket Hurricanes for third place in the North Division standings and the final playoff spot in the North-East. The Spirit, which won its only OJHL title in 2012, missed the playoffs for the first time in recent memory last season.

After a scoreless opening period that saw the Muskies direct 18 shots on Mannella, the Spirit's penalty-killing unit generated the game's first goal on an unassisted marker by Michael Morgan after they had just killed off the first of two minor penalties. For the Spirit, Morgan's goal marked the third straight game in which they've scored while playing shorthanded. With the final outcome still in doubt late in the third period, the Spirit added an insurance marker with just under four minutes to play in regulation time on a goal by recently acquired Andres Kopstals. Graham Pickard, another recent acquisition by the Spirit, rounded out the scoring into an empty net when the Muskies pulled net minder Branden Francey in favour of an extra attacker.

INSIDER: With the league's trade deadline tomorrow, the Spirit haven't made any noise. But head coach Jeff Perrin hinted the club could make some roster moves. (See yorkregion.com for our story and updates) Spirit graduate Darren Archibald was recalled by the Vancouver Canucks from their American Hockey League affiliate in Utica Tuesday. He played for the Canucks in their 5-4 shootout loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins that night. He appeared in eight games earlier this season.

Former Stouffville resident Mike Galati won't be behind the Pickering bench

tonight. The head coach of the resurgent Panthers received two- and seven-game suspensions from the OJHL after picking up an abuse of official match penalty and misconduct following his team's 7-4 loss to Buffalo in Pickering Friday. Buffalo scored the final six goals of the game.

The Spirit penalty killing units rank 13th in the league's latest statistics with an 81.82 per cent efficiency rating. They are also tied for second with the Pickering Panthers in shorthanded goals for with eight and are just one behind the Whitby Fury. In power play rankings, the Spirit sport an 18.62 per cent efficiency rating that's 15th overall. They are also tied with the Buffalo Junior Sabres in second place in shorthanded goals against with just two.

On the collegiate scene, former Spirit forward Matt Neal scored a goal in Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute's 6-2 loss to the University of Minnesota in the third place game at the Mariucci Classic in Minneapolis Saturday. Playing against Ferris State in first round action one day earlier, the junior forward had an assist in a 6-2 loss. Neal is RPI's third-leading scorer with eight goals and 12 assists in 20 games.

Stouffville resident and former Spirit forward Chris Porter scored a goal in American International College's 4-3 overtime win over the Air Force Academy in West

Springfield, Mass. Friday. Porter is in his sophomore year at AIC. Former Spirit forward Drake Caggiula had one assist in the University of North Dakota's 4-3 win over Simon Fraser University in the Great Northwest Showcase in Burnaby, B.C. Saturday. Currently in his sophomore year, Caggiula is tied for second in team scoring with five goals and six assists in 18 tilts.

On the Canadian collegiate scene, former Spirit forward Tyler vonEngelbrechten netted a goal in the University of Toronto Varsity Blues' 3-1 road loss to Lakehead University in Thunder Bay Friday.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: Perrin acknowledged Mannella's work between the pipes was the key ingredient in their win over Lindsay.

"Mannella played great and definitely was the difference in the game. It was his best game all year," he said.

Just as important, Perrin was quick to add, was the work of their penalty-killing unit that accounted for the game-winning marker as they were attempting to fend off a two-man disadvantage which they ultimately did.

"We found a way to win," he said.

In explaining their success in scoring a shorthanded goal in each of their last three games, Perrin attributed it to their aggress-

siveness.

"They've just been doing a good job of causing turnovers and capitalizing on those situations," he pointed out.

With two home games upcoming starting against the Pickering Panthers tonight and the Buffalo Junior Sabres Sunday, Perrin acknowledged these are tilts they must take advantage of.

"But they will be tough games," he said. "Hopefully we can get some points out of these games."

In three prior meetings against the Panthers this season, the Spirit have won one while losing the other two games.

To beat the Panthers, Perrin said it will be critical for their forwards to create some havoc in front of their net.

Citing the Panthers are also a strong transition team, Perrin warned his club must limit their turnovers.

In facing Buffalo, a team which they defeated earlier this season, Perrin said the key will be if they can outthrust them.

"Buffalo is a good team and when we played them earlier their goalie didn't play too well, but we skated with them. They have a good skill set, we just have to out-work them," he said.

- Michael Hayakawa