

JR. A NOTEBOOK: Tough test tonight against Aurora

Spirit falls out of playoff spot

LAST WEEK: Friday: Stouffville Spirit 3 vs. St. Michael's Buzzers 2 (overtime). Sunday: Stouffville Spirit 4 vs. Hamilton Red Wings 3. Tuesday: Newmarket Hurricanes 2 vs. Spirit 1. Spirit record: 18 wins, one overtime loss, three shootout losses, 24 losses, 40 points. Fourth place in North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Today: vs. Aurora Tigers at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m. Saturday: at Mississauga Chargers, 8 p.m. Sunday: vs. Lindsay Muskies at Stouffville Arena, 2:30 p.m.

GAME NOTES: For the Stouffville Spirit, their rescheduled road contest against the Newmarket Hurricanes Tuesday revisited a theme – good defence and little offence. That did not bode well for the Spirit, who are battling the Hurricanes for what could be the final playoff spot in the league's North-East Conference, as they came out on the short end of a 2-1 decision. Newmarket held a 2-0 lead into the third period when the Spirit pelted Hurricanes' netminder Jophrey Gregoire with 19 shots. They were rewarded just over 12 minutes in on a goal by Tyson Bruce. But the Spirit could get no closer.

The loss by the Spirit snapped a two-game winning streak and put them two points behind the Hurricanes.

If there were any positives to draw from during the weekend, the Spirit exhibited plenty of character in their 4-3 come-

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from-behind win over the Hamilton Red Wings at the Stouffville Arena Sunday. Trailing 3-0 early in the second period, the Spirit responded with four unanswered goals by captain Matt Heffernan, Michael Carcone, Tyson Bruce and Andres Kopstals. Graham Pickard was awarded a penalty shot early in the period but failed to score. Hamilton took 11 straight penalties and misconducts, including the penalty shot. Three of the four Stouffville goals were on the power play. The win had the Spirit in a playoff spot, briefly.

The Spirit began weekend play with a gruelling 3-2 overtime road win over the St. Michael's Buzzers. Peyton Backus scored the game-winning goal with 15 seconds remaining in the five-minute extra session. Joseph Deveny and Bruce scored for the Spirit during regulation time. Despite being outshot by the Buzzers 44-36, the Spirit swept the regular season series.

INSIDER: The Spirit played through the weekend without defencemen Jack O'Hara and Dakota Redshaw and forward Justin Wain. All three are nursing lower

body injuries and are out indefinitely ... The OJHL is accepting nominations for its third annual Fan Favourite Award. Enter at: www.ojhl.ca before March 31 at 5 p.m. ET. Former Spirit captain Andrew Doyle was the inaugural recipient in 2012 ... The Spirit they will hold their second annual golf tournament Aug. 14.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "It was a tough one," said Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin of his club's setback against the Hurricanes. "It was the same story, we played well defensively but we couldn't score. Newmarket's goaltending is suspect and most of the shots we took weren't good ones. Most of them were right at (Gregoire).

"But we didn't start playing well until the third period. For a game like that, where we're battling for a playoff spot and it was probably to date our biggest game of the season, that's disappointing.

"If we played a full 60 minutes I thought we could have won. At least we get to play them one more time."

Tonight's opponent, the North Division-leading Aurora Tigers, are ranked seventh by the Canadian Junior Hockey League.

"We might be playing the best team in the league. They're a veteran team with a deep lineup. For us to win, we need a few breaks and we have to stay out of the penalty box and get some hot goaltending," Perrin said.

– Michael Hayakawa



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Stouffville Spirit forward Peyton Backus eyes the puck as Newmarket Hurricane Curtis Harvey skates by during the Canes 2-1 win Tuesday.



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