

Spirit makes big moves to roster, hockey staff

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The Stouffville Spirit would just as soon forget about their last two Ontario Junior Hockey League campaigns.

Especially as they were seasons in which the Spirit failed to qualify for the postseason – two years after winning the OJHL title.

In an attempt to remedy this dilemma, the Spirit has begun the process of making major changes before the puck is dropped to commence the 2014-15 campaign.

On the ice, the Spirit pulled the trigger on two transactions to bolster their blueline.

One deal saw the Spirit acquire Greg Allen from the Oakville Blades in exchange for veteran starting goalkeeper Daniel Mannella.

Last season with the Blades, the 17-year-old, six-foot, three-inch, 190-pound Allen amassed eight goals and 11 assists. The 2012-13 campaign marked Allen's first season in the OJHL where he toiled with the St. Michael's Buzzers for 26 games and had five assists.

BIG DEFENCEMEN

Acquired by the Spirit from the Georgetown Raiders during the 2012-13 season, Mannella, 18, played in 42 games with Stouffville last season and had a 3.21 goals against average and .904 save percentage.

Another move came with the acquisition of Adam Burnett from Hamilton Red Wings for future considerations. The six-foot, three-inch, 200-lb. 17-year-old Waterdown native began last season with the Burlington Cougars before going to Hamilton and had two goals and 19 assists in 49 tilts.

Spirit director of player personnel Frank Robinson said both are experienced hands.

"Burnett and Allen have played two years in Jr. A and are good defensively with good shots from point. We hope to help them add to their offensive game with opportunities," he said.

Colton Sansom was obtained from the Mattawa Blackhawks (formerly North Bay Trappers) of the Northern Ontario Loop. The

Barrie native is a 6-foot-2 forward.

The Spirit have also signed six new faces to their roster – including two goalkeepers.

Among those is Aaron Taylor, who played last season with the Stayner Siskins Jr. C team and was a draftee of the Owen Sound Attack of the Ontario Hockey League in 2012.

Last season with Stayner, the 17-year-old Aurora resident played in 24 regular season games and had a 2.61 goals against average and .919 save percentage.

Expected to battle Taylor for a spot between the pipes is Connor McCollum, who played last season with the Ontario Minor Hockey Association champion Ajax-Pickering midjets.

Taylor is pencilled in as the No. 1 goalie. The Spirit is shopping last year's backup, Tim Bester.

Also signing with the Spirit from the Ajax-Pickering Raiders midjets were defenceman John Loncaric and forwards Nathan Hudgin and Robert Clark.

Another forward signed was Brock Traill from the Peterborough midjets. The Fenelon Falls product was with the Central Ontario Wolves minor midjets during 2012-13 – with Spirit players Nick Thomakos and Brady Baker.

Off the ice, the Spirit have made several changes as well. It's this area Robinson felt was a major priority upon taking on the role as the club's director of player personnel late last season.

"That's the way I've always worked," he said. "Maybe it's a little different from Kenny's (Burrows, Spirit co-owner and general manager) style. But I've always had people around me who are good hockey people."

While Jeff Perrin will return for his third season as head coach along with assistant coach Brad Barton and goalie coach Tracy Green, Robinson announced the addition of several new members to the staff.

Among the moves was to bring in Dave Demarinis as an assistant coach.

A 28-year-old Pickering resident, Demarin-



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

New additions to the Stouffville Spirit at the weekend Strawberry Festival include Brock Traill (from left), Robert Clark, Greg Allen and Colton Sansom.

is no stranger to Robinson as he became familiar with him as a 1986-born AAA player from Ajax. Coaching with Ajax-Pickering and Whitby during the past six seasons, Demarinis will concentrate his efforts with the Spirit's special teams and offence.

"Our special teams needed improvement," Robinson said. "To do that though, we need to get some skilled players."

Joining Demarinis on the coaching staff is his older brother Joe, who will serve as video coach and break down game tape during and after games. He will also take on other duties as assigned by Perrin.

"They (Dave and Joe) are both young and they can relate to the younger guys. Most important though, they're dedicated hockey guys," he said.

Robinson felt another priority was to identify and procure potential prospects.

To assist in this facet, Robinson augmented the club's scouting staff by hiring Mike Cassidy, Dave Dickson and Glenn Snyder.

An Ajax resident, Cassidy will be scouring rinks in Durham Region and the ETA. Cassidy is quite familiar with the OJHL having served as a scout for the Pickering Panthers prior to taking a sabbatical last season.

Dickson is also known to Robinson as the pair worked together at the start of last season with the Whitby Fury. Dickson served as the club's assistant general manager.

TWO NEW GOALIES

In scouting for the Spirit, Dickson will concentrate his efforts on the Central Ontario region from his Port Perry residence.

"Dave's been involved with Port Perry minor hockey for a long time and he's a guy who is in the rink every night," he said.

With 15 years of OJHL experience with Pickering and Whitby, Snyder will look for players in the Greater Toronto Hockey League.

The Spirit's medical staff is also in place as Robinson announced Drew Laskoski and Leslie Dias will return as athletic therapists.

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