

JR. A NOTEBOOK

Stingy weekend for Spirit, rookie netminder

LAST WEEK: Saturday: Stouffville Spirit 5 vs Pickering Panthers 1. Sunday: Stouffville Spirit 4 vs. North York Rangers 0. Spirit record: 17-12-2-1-37, second place in North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Saturday vs. Lindsay Muskies at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m. Monday at Cobourg Cougars, 7 p.m.

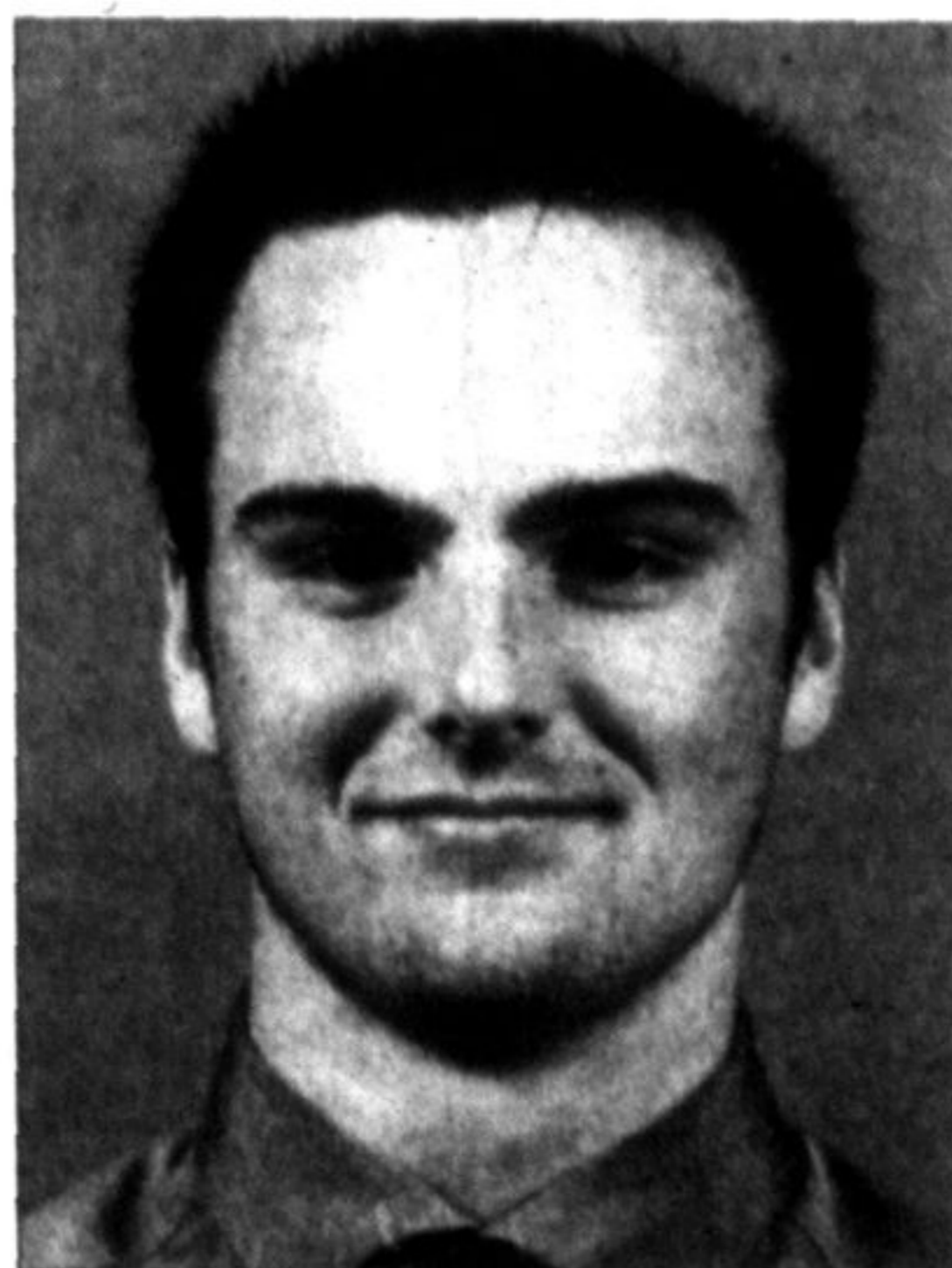
GAME NOTES: For Conor McCollum the puck was as big as a beach ball when he took to the ice to guard the twine for the Stouffville Spirit in a pair of Ontario Junior Hockey League tilts last weekend. For the Spirit, that was good news as the 17-year-old Pickering resident and first-year Stouffville netminder stopped all but one shot in two contests that resulted in a pair of victories - a 5-1 win over the Pickering Panthers at the Stouffville Arena Saturday followed by a 4-0 road verdict over the North York Rangers the following day. For McCollum, the shutout earned was his second of the season and the two victories enabled him to be the winning netminder in six of his last seven outings. Not to mention he's lowered his goals against average to 3.05 and improved his save percentage to .910. While McCollum had a weekend to remember, so too did the Spirit, as they've been victorious in

three of their last four outings and have sole possession of second place in the North Division.

In starting their weekend off against Pickering, the Spirit erupted with four unanswered goals in the third period. Chris Brill-Morgan's second period goal had the Spirit up 1-0 entering the third. Pickering call-up Tiger McDonald tied it up. But 1:05 later Alex Gilmour netted would be the game winner. Brodie Tutton, a former member of the Panthers, and Tyson Bruce scored Spirit goals 36 seconds apart and Joe Deveny iced the game with an empty-netter. McCollum stopped 35 shots to earn the win.

With little time to dwell on that outing, the Spirit snapped a four-game road losing streak behind McCollum's performance between the pipes in a 4-0 victory. Stouffville native Chad Burrows delivered his fourth and fifth goals in four games to pace the Spirit. Nathan Hudgin, 16, had a goal and two assists. Tutton added three assists. Defencemen Michael Giacometti scored the other goal.

INSIDER: Spirit forward and Stouffville resident Spencer Roberts returned to action Sunday following a two-game suspension. But forward Liam O'Dette is expected to be out for close to two weeks



CONOR MCCOLLUM: First-year goalie shuts out North York, beats hometown team during weekend.

due to lower body injury.

Tutton leads the Spirit in scoring with 13 goals and 21 assists followed by Thomas with 12 goals and 20 assists.

Former Spirit defenceman Jack Caradonna, who plays for the State University of New York at Geneseo Knights, was named

the recipient of the school's prestigious Dr. Sam Molnar Award. The award recognizes the top men's scholar-athlete in the New York Athletic Conference. The 24-year-old senior is a biology major with a 3.93 grade point average. He's the fourth Academic All-America in school history, and first in 39 years of the men's hockey program. A Markham resident, Caradonna played with the Spirit in 2010-11 and amassed 10 goals and 31 assists in 47 games that season.

Former Spirit forward Drake Caggiula scored a goal to help the top-ranked University of North Dakota down 11th ranked University of Denver 3-1 in Denver Saturday. Caggiula's goal, his eighth of the season, coupled with 14 assists, enabled him to maintain the league lead in scoring with 22 points.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "I'm definitely feeling more confident in myself in developing more as a goalie," McCollum said of his recent outings.

While quick to note he's gained more confidence as the season has been unfolding in his first year of junior A action, the Grade 12 student was quick to give credit to his teammates, as he feels since the start of the season, they've developed a good chemistry.

"There's been good communication where my defence and forwards know me and I know them in how to play the puck and when to get out of the way so I can see any shots," he explained.

During the Sunday tilt in which he was pitching a shutout, McCollum was quick to acknowledge the thought of recording one entered his mind.

"Sure it (earning a shutout) was on my mind, but you don't want to think of it. I tried to put it out of my mind for the longest time that I could," he said.

"The guys played really well. It was more about the two wins," he said.

In looking ahead to their next two outings, the first of which will be a home game against the North Division cellar dwelling Lindsay Muskies Saturday and followed by a road game against the East Division-leading Cobourg Cougars Monday, a team they have not played yet this season, McCollum warned they cannot take things for granted.

"Even though Lindsay is sort of a rivalry game for us, we have to take things one game at a time. And we know Cobourg is a good team and we have to prepare for that one," he said.

-Michael Hayakawa

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