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SPIRIT TAKE FIRST EVER OJHL CROWN

Dramatic overtime victory erases 3-1 deficit

By Bruce Stapley
Stouffville Free Press

It wasn't the best attended parade to ever make its way down Main Street, and the few people walking along the sidewalks just after midnight April 13 could be forgiven for wondering what the fuss was about.

But the old Stouffville tradition of honouring homecoming hockey champions could not be denied. Two fire trucks, their sirens wailing, along with horn-honking cars, provided the honour guard for the bus carrying the newly-minted Ontario Junior Hockey League (OJHL) champion Stouffville Spirit.

The Spirit's dramatic overtime victory in the sixth and deciding game of the OJHL's Buckland Cup final series came after they scored twice in the final 44 seconds of the third period to erase a 3-1 deficit. When Brandon Gaudette broke the Whitby Fury's heart with his goal half way through the first overtime period, the multitude of Stouffville faithful who had made the trip to Whitby almost brought the arena roof down.

The fire truck parade was hastily arranged by Mayor Wayne Emmerson. The mayor, along with councillors Rob Hargrave and Richard Bartley, joined the Spirit for their post parade celebrations that went into the wee hours of the morning at Stouffville's Boston Pizza.

It was the first-ever league title since the Spirit's inception in 1995. For team general manager and co-owner Ken Burrows, the triumph marked the pinnacle of a job he has done with ever-increasing savvy while holding the GM's role for all but a year and a half since the turn of the century.

"The goal every year is to win your division," Ken said of his team's championship victory. "Then after that it's all about injuries and how many bodies you have that can play well."

And play well they did, winning all four series in the playoffs. They bested the Aurora Tigers in five games before edging out the favoured Newmarket Hurricanes to claim the North Division title. Next came a nail-biting victory in a seven game league semi-final against Georgetown, setting the stage for the showdown with Whitby.

See Spirit Page 13

Team captain Andrew Doyle is surrounded by ecstatic boosters after the Stouffville Spirit beat the Whitby Fury to win the coveted OJHL crown on April 13.

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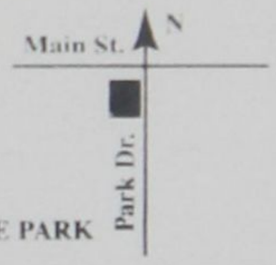

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