

Spirit scoops up prospects who were Newmarket-bound

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The Stouffville Spirit's starting roster for the 2015-16 Ontario Junior Hockey League regular season is slowly but surely being formulated.

With some 30 hopefuls on the Stouffville Arena ice during the club's main training camp that commenced last week, Spirit co-owner and general manager Kenny Burrows unveiled three players he signed on the dotted line.

They include defencemen Kyle Linney, 17, and Justin Mahabir, 17, and forward Jack Varga, 17.

Linney and Varga toiled last season with the York Simcoe Express AAA major midgets.

Mahabir comes from a successful program after being part of the Telus Cup-winning Young Nats AAA major midgets last season.

Linney and Mahabir bring a physical presence to Stouffville.

"They're both big strong kids who are over six feet tall and they played well in minor hockey," Burrows said.

Smallish in stature at around five-foot, eight inches, Varga's assets are being elusive but not afraid of the rough going.

OHL, USHL CAMPS

"He is small, but he's speedy, tough and strong," cited Burrows.

On the subject of Varga and Linney, Burrows was also quick to note the pair were ticketed to go to the rival Newmarket Hurricanes, where former Spirit head coach Brian Perrin was general manager and coach.

But with Perrin, whose brother Jeff coaches the Spirit, fired in March, Burrows scooped the pair.

In coming days, Burrows said the club will announce further sign-

ings along with offering AP spots to hopefuls and severing ties with others.

Before their roster is finalized, though, the Spirit are waiting to see if their eligible returnees will move up the competitive ladder or return from attending major junior camps.

"We've got a number of kids all over the place," Burrows said. "We're not set yet as to who is coming back."

Nick Thomakos will be auditioning with the Barrie Colts of the OHL. Alex Gilmour will be at a United States Hockey League camp.

Among players offered a spot on their AP roster included rookie goal-keeper and Stouffville resident Kyle Pescador, who would play for the Ajax-Pickering major midgets AAA club this season.

With last year's netminders, Conor McCollum and Gormley resident Aaron Taylor, expected back, that did not leave room for Pescador to start the season with the Spirit.

He should get plenty of playing time with Ajax-Pickering.

The Spirit opened its preseason schedule with a 7-6 road loss to the Lindsay Muskies Saturday.

Varga, Devon Leduc, Kieran Beaudoin, Christian Papineau, Alex Williamson and Beau Bennie each scored once for the Spirit, who trailed 2-1 after the opening 20 minutes and 5-2 through two before mounting a furious comeback in the third before falling short.

The Muskies outshot the Spirit 37-30.

Taking to the ice the following day, the Spirit played the Pickering Panthers and skated off with a 4-1 win in Ajax.

Gilmour, Ty Kubla, Varga and Kyle

Thomas, with an empty net marker, each scored once for the Spirit, who trailed 1-0 after the opening period before rebounding to take a 2-1 lead through two.

Playing his second game in as

many days between the pipes for the Spirit, Pescador stopped 30 of 31 shots directed at him. The Spirit had 33 shots on the Panthers' net.

The Spirit are scheduled to play their first home preseason

game against Lindsay today at the Stouffville Arena at 7:30 p.m.

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Fund helping kids stay on ice

Minor hockey registration fees can be taxing on a family.

Especially during uncertain economic times when a family member might be laid off from work.

For families wishing to register their youngsters in the upcoming Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association campaign, who are strapped for funds, fear not.

A program that will be entering its fourth year — the Kids First Fund — can offer assistance.

Peter Harmsen, a fund spokesperson, cited those eligible to apply for aid must be residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville and their youngsters must register in the WSMHA.

As well, the program is primarily geared for those who register in their house league program.

However, he noted there have been occasions when they have offered financial assistance to players in select and rep programs.

"We have money that we would

like to use for families who cannot afford to have their kids playing," he said. "We want the money to stay in the community."

Last year, they assisted 13 to 14 families. The year before, 23.

Families who wish to apply must first register with the WSMHA. From there, families can apply for assistance in total anonymity.

Candidates will then talk with Kids First Fund committee members to see if they fit the program's criteria. They can also direct families who require equipment to sources.

Harmsen is pleased with how the program has worked in Whitchurch-Stouffville and with the response from generous donations provided by community members and organizations to make it happen.

"It's been good in the past and we want to let people to know there is money available for registration and we want to help," he said.

For details, go to www.wsmha.com or go to the minor hockey office at the Stouffville Arena.