

Spirit hopes to remain hot at weekend Showcase

LAST WEEK: Saturday: Stouffville Spirit 6 vs. Pickering Panthers 4. Spirit record: 17-18-1-2-37. Fourth place North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Friday: at Lindsay Muskies, 7:30 p.m. Saturday vs. Whitby Fury, at Trenton, 4:30 p.m. Sunday vs. Kingston Voyageurs in Trenton, 4 p.m. - both games are part of the OJHL's North-East Conference Showcase.

It took two periods for the Stouffville Spirit to get out of their deep sleep when they faced the Pickering Panthers in their Ontario Junior Hockey League game at the Stouffville Arena Saturday. But when they woke up after trailing 4-1 through 40 minutes, the Spirit offence erupted with five unanswered third-period goals and skated off with a 6-4 win - their fourth in the last five outings. Igniting the comeback was **Nathan Hudgin**, who deposited the first of his two goals at the 13-second mark. The Spirit then capitalized on a Panthers' penalty to Doug Carter when **Chad Burrows** scored just over two minutes in to cut their deficit to within a goal. Just before the midway mark, the Spirit tied the game on a goal by **Stefan Palatsidis**. With momentum clearly on their side, the Spirit took the lead on Hudgin's second goal with just under four minutes remaining in regulation

time. The Spirit then iced the game on a goal by team captain **Spencer Roberts**. The Spirit opened the scoring just past the midway mark of the first period on a goal by **Max Novick**. Former Spirit defenceman **Robert Clark** scored a pair of unanswered goals for the Panthers. Stouffville outshot Pickering 32-29.

INSIDER: With the league's Jan. 10 trade deadline having come and gone, the Spirit stayed pat with their current roster. **Kenny Burrows**, Spirit co-owner and general manager, was hoping to make a move or two to bolster their roster but said the demand was far greater than what he would have wanted to part with.

Hudgin continues to lead the Spirit in scoring with 41 points (18 goals and 23 assists) while **Chris Brill-Morgan** follows with 40 (17 goals, 23 assists). The Spirit power-play currently ranks ninth overall with a 19.11 per cent efficiency mark while their penalty killing is 12th at 81 per cent. The Spirit played Saturday's game without the services of rookie defenceman **Justin Mahibir**, who sat out the first of a two-game suspension after incurring a second fighting major during the second period of Thursday's 6-4 road win over Kingston.

Former Spirit forward **Drake Caggula** scored a goal for top-ranked North



NATHAN HUDGIN: Spirit's leading scorer wins battle of brothers in comeback victory over Pickering.

Dakota in their 4-1 win over the United States under-18 team in an exhibition game played in Grand Forks, N.D. Saturday. The senior leads his team in scoring with 29 points (14 goals, 15 assists). Former Spirit forward and Stouffville resident **Chris Porter** scored a goal in American International College's 8-2 road loss to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs,

Colo. Friday. Currently in his senior year and serving as team captain, Porter is the club's fourth-leading scorer with 10 points (four goals, six assists).

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "I tried to make a move (at the trade deadline), but nothing came up," Burrows said. "If you look at teams like Kingston, they did not do anything and that was shocking. That's how hard it was to make deals.

"There were some deals made, but I think they were pre-done ... What can you do. Some days you get more than you need and other days, nothing."

In reflecting on their win over Pickering, Hudgin was quick to acknowledge some words were said in the dressing room prior to the start of the third period.

"All of the guys were mad. Coach (**Jeff Perrin**) settled us down and we knew what we had to do from there," he said.

As for what the Spirit did in the final 20 minutes, Hudgin noted they reverted to keeping things simple and playing as a cohesive unit.

After coming off a hard-fought and emotional 6-4 road win over the Kingston Voyageurs, one of powerhouses in the North-East Conference, Thursday, and having defeated Pickering rather handily on

New Year's eve 10-1, Hudgin conceded the club might have let their guard down a little this time around.

"It's hard to come in the same way you do with every team," he said. "We felt it was a game we had in the bag. I think we all thought it was a point night, an individual effort. But in the end, we came together as a team."

In facing Pickering, Hudgin said it gives him some extra incentive from a personal perspective as it provides an opportunity for him to face his brother John, who is the Panthers' leading scorer.

"You know, it's always fun, the family comes out and it's always a battle when he's on the ice. I love him but I love to beating him, too," he said.

In looking ahead to their upcoming schedule, which has the Spirit playing three road games in as many days starting Friday against the last-place Lindsay Muskies and two in Trenton as part of the league's inaugural North-East Conference Showcase, Hudgin noted they will be crucial if the club hopes to procure a spot in the postseason and with it, possible home ice advantage.

"We've got to win these games," he said.
- Michael Hayakawa

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