

Spirit falls out of playoff spot with winless weekend

LAST WEEK: Friday: Lindsay Muskies 4 vs. Stouffville Spirit 1. Saturday: Whitby Fury 5 vs. Spirit 1. Sunday: Kingston Voyageurs 3 vs. Spirit 2. Spirit record: 17-21-1-2-37. Fourth place North Division, Ontario Junior Hockey League.

COMING UP: Saturday: vs. Markham Royals at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m.

Just when the Stouffville Spirit thought they might have things figured out entering the stretch run of their regular season, they took a couple of steps backwards after losing three games in as many days last weekend, leaving them four points out of the final playoff spot in the North-East Conference. A foreboding sign of things to come began Friday when the Spirit suffered a 4-1 road loss against the last-place Lindsay Muskies. The lone

bright spot for the Spirit came in the opening period when Stefan Palatsidis scored to send both clubs into the first intermission in a 1-1 tie.

Travelling to Trenton for the first of their two games in the league's North-East Conference Showcase to face the Whitby Fury the following day, the Spirit offence continued to sputter as they generated just one goal by Ryan DaSilva in a 5-1 loss.

Less than 24 hours later, the Spirit faced the Kingston Voyageurs in their second Showcase game and appeared headed to procure at least one point. But Kingston's Ian Harris scored with under four minutes remaining to give the Voyageurs a 3-2 win and extend Stouffville's losing skid to three games. Sam Hu scored a pair of power-play goals for Stouffville.

INSIDER: Christopher Brill-Morgan continues to lead the Spirit in scoring with 42 points (17 goals, 25 assists), while Nathan Hudgin is second with 41 (18 goals, 23 assists) and DaSilva third 36 points (10 goals, 26 assists).

GENERALLY SPEAKING: "It definitely wasn't a good weekend, we had three losses in three very winnable games," said Spirit captain Spencer Roberts.

The entire team has to shoulder the blame, he said.

That was evident during Friday's road game against Lindsay, who are in last place in the North Division, and carried over the following day against Whitby during the first of their two North-East Conference Showcase games in Trenton.

"I guess you can say we were looking forward to the Showcase games. But that's no excuse," Roberts said.

"Against Lindsay we might have taken them for granted seeing where they were in the standings. Sometimes it's hard to get through those games. Those are teams we should be beating. I don't think we were prepared and there was no effort."

In looking ahead to their next contest when they host the Markham Royals, a team that's also been in a bit of a slump, Roberts said it will be imperative that the team put the past behind them and forge on.

"We can't think of the past. We've got to move forward and try to keep things simple when we play," he said.

- Michael Hayakawa



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