

Spirit in playoff spot after 6th straight victory

LAST WEEK: Saturday: Stouffville Spirit 6 vs. Lindsay Muskies 3. Monday: Spirit 6 vs. Newmarket Hurricanes 5 (double overtime) Spirit record: 24-22-1-3-52. Fourth place North Division and eighth overall with Cobourg Cougars in North-East Conference, Ontario Junior Hockey League

COMING UP: Today: at Newmarket Hurricanes, 7:30 p.m. Friday: at Wellington Dukes, 7:30 p.m. Saturday: Aurora Tigers at Stouffville Arena, 7:30 p.m.

With the regular season rapidly winding down, the Stouffville Spirit picked a good time to be playing some of their best hockey of the 2015-16 campaign. Vying for one of the final playoff spots in the North-East Conference, the Spirit are on a six-game winning streak and currently hold down the eighth and final postseason spot. The most recent win came on Family Day when the Spirit and Newmarket Hurricanes battled through two overtime periods before Stouffville emerged with a hard-fought 6-5 win. Playing the game at the Stouffville

Arena before the biggest crowd – 527 – in this season, the Spirit got a goal from their leading scorer, Nathan Hudgin, at the 4:32 mark of the second overtime period to skate off with the two points.

Josh Argier scored two goals and collected a pair of helpers, including one on the power play in the third period to force overtime for the Spirit, who battled Newmarket to a 1-1 tie after the first period and led 4-2 through two. Defenceman Ryan DaSilva, Jack Varga and Alex Williamson added single tallies. Newmarket delivered 38 shots on Spirit goaltender Aaron Taylor. Stouffville fired 34 shots on Newmarket goalkeeper Aidan Doak.

The win came on the heels of a 6-3 victory over the Lindsay Muskies at the Stouffville Arena Saturday. Hudgin had three goals while DaSilva added a pair. Sam Hu added the other goal for the Spirit.

INSIDER: Prior to the start of Monday's matinee, Mayor Justin Altmann took part in opening face-off ceremonies.

Hu incurred a two-game suspension after being called third man in during a scuffle at the 20-minute mark of the second period Saturday. Acquired by the Spirit early this season, Hu did not play Monday and will sit out tonight's rematch in Newmarket – against the team that traded him to Stouffville last fall.

Captain Spencer Roberts remained out of the Spirit roster for their weekend games. No definite timetable has been set for his return, said Spirit head coach Jeff Perrin.

GENERALLY SPEAKING: “The guys are determined to win,” said Perrin. “They know what's at stake and they've all been stepping up and playing well.”

Reflecting on their success, Perrin said the biggest aspect that's pleased him has been the character they've exhibited of late. A big part of which has developed once the club finished its dealing of players and avoiding the dreaded injury bug for the most part of the season.

“Their compete level has been consistent lately, they're finding ways to win and they've developed a will to win,” he said. “Everyone has stepped up their game a little bit more.”

As well, Perrin praised the work of his special teams units of late, especially their power play, which is sixth best in the OJHL.

“The guys have been keeping it simple. When they get chances on the power play they're finishing things off now,” he said.

With just four regular season games remaining, Perrin said they cannot afford to take their foot off the accelerator. Should the club win the remaining games, they could vault up in the North-East Conference playoff positioning race.

“All of our remaining games will be tough. We have a big game Thursday (against rival Newmarket) and if we can win that we could move past them in the standings,” he noted as the Spirit are just one point behind the Hurricanes.

Hudgin felt a big factor in the club's reversal of fortunes after they started the regular season 0-8-2, was a message Perrin had delivered to the team not too long ago.

“He (Perrin) said the playoffs are coming and if we don't play well we won't be in them,” Hudgin said. “I just want to make the playoffs. With four games left it's going to be a real battle. We want to keep our streak going for as long as possible. So far, our lines have been good.”

“It's tough to see Spencer (Roberts) and Sammy (Hu) being out, but the guys are doing what they have to do to win.”

“I think we always knew that we had it in us,” added veteran forward Chad Burrows. “We started out slow in our first 10 games. We weren't getting the bounces. But now things are coming together just in time for the playoffs. We've developed a good chemistry and the guys have been working well together.”

– Michael Hayakawa

Off-ice minor hockey stars sought

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association would like to know which head coach, assistant coach, trainer or team manager has made a significant contribution to the local minor hockey scene.

They could be the recipient of this year's Steve Wright memorial ward.

If you know of someone who fits the qualifications, send an outline of why you feel they are a deserving candidate by March 1 to the WSMHA's hockey office or info@wsmdha.com

Burrows 3rd on all-time Spirit list

When Chad Burrows stepped onto the Stouffville Arena ice for the Stouffville Spirit's game tilt against the Lindsay Muskies Saturday, it represented a special occasion in his Ontario Junior Hockey League career.

For the 19-year-old Stouffville resident, it marked his 192nd regular season game in donning a Spirit uniform that began in 2012.

In doing so, Burrows surpassed former defenceman Matt Heffernan and moved into third place for most games played by a player during the Spirit's 20-year history.

While the league's data only dates back to the 2005-06 campaign, Spirit co-owner and general manager and uncle of Chad, Kenny Burrows, said former captain Randy Johnston played the most number of games for the club followed by defenceman J.D. Smithson. Both logged five seasons with the Spirit.

“About 10 games ago Alex (Williamson) showed me that I was getting closer to it. But before that time I had no idea I was getting close to it,” Chad said.

“To do it in front of my family and friends is a bonus,” he said. “It's been easy for me to go to the rink and have fun.”



BRIAN WATTS/OJHL IMAGES

CHAD BURROWS

He has 17 goals and 13 assists in 44 regular season contests this year, his fourth with the Spirit.

“I've had a couple of small injuries along the way where I've been out a couple of games at a time,” he said. “But I've been pretty lucky so far.”

While Burrows can continue to add onto his streak as he has one more year of tier two Jr. A eligibility next season and is in line to challenge Smithson and Johnston's longevity marks, he would like nothing more than to make a major contribution to assist the Spirit in their late-season push towards making the postseason, as they currently are riding a six-game winning streak.

“We definitely want to make the playoffs,” he said. “We're in eighth place now (in the North-East Conference playoff standings) and we want to keep it going.”

“Right now we just need to win as many games as possible and to get a little help from some other teams.”

– Michael Hayakawa

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DROP IN

BALL HOCKEY

Stouffville Arena - Pad B

MONDAYS

7:00 - 8:30pm Kids/Youth (7-10 years)

8:30 - 10:00pm Adults (18+ years)

WEDNESDAY

7:00 - 8:30pm Kids/Youth (11-15 years)

8:30 - 10:00pm Adults (18+ years)

Drop-in Fee:

\$5.00/Youth \$10.00/Adult

Dates:

Mondays, May 9 - July 18 (No games on May 23)

Wednesday, May 25 - July 20

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Contact Erich Baumhard at
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