

Spirit hoping for stronger start to season when puck drops Saturday

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The Stouffville Spirit hope history does not have a way of repeating itself.

At least not the manner in which last season unfolded when the Ontario Junior Hockey League club failed to win a game in their first 10 contests, which factored into their failure to qualify for the postseason.

With the Spirit set to embark on their 2016-17 regular season when they play the Pickering Panthers at the Stouffville Arena Saturday at 7:30 p.m., veteran head coach Jeff Perrin is cautiously optimistic the club's fortunes will be far better at the start this time around.

HOCKEY CANADA

"I really didn't think we would start last year 0-8-2, but there's nothing you could do about it," he said.

Based on his observations during training camp and the pre-season, which saw the Spirit win four of six tilts, Perrin was pleased with the attitude of the veterans and hopefuls and feels it will carry over when play begins for keeps.

What has Perrin in a far more positive frame of mind this time around starts between the pipes as the Spirit will have veteran Aaron Taylor ready to answer the bell and is penciled in to play the majority of games this season for them.

That was a far cry from the start of last season when the 19-year-old Gormley resident was on the sidelines with a dislocated shoulder incurred during the preseason.

The Spirit also received some good tidings last weekend in solidifying their goaltending depth when the Peterborough Petes re-assigned their fifth round pick of the 2016 Ontario Hockey League priority selection in goaltender Hunter Jones to the Spirit.

Playing last season with the Mississauga Rebels minor mid-gets, Jones, 15, comes to the Spirit with an impressive resume having also played in Hockey Canada's Under-17 Program of Excellence goaltender camp in July, and was part of the Team GTHL Blue that won the OHL Gold Cup championship.

"We definitely have two quality goalies," Perrin said.



AARON TAYLOR: Gormley resident will anchor netminding duties for the Stouffville Spirit this season.

Adding some stability to the back end will be the return of four defencemen including Max Novick, Connor Evans, Justin Mahabir and Cameron Lintner.

Bolstering the blueline was the acquisition of Brody Jennings, 19, who played last season with the English River Miners of the Superior International Junior Hockey League.

A native of Kelowna, B.C., the six-foot, 185-pound Jennings is a stay-at-home type of defender who compiled 12 assists in 53 games last year.

Perrin is hoping those five can offset the loss of veteran Ryan DaSilva, who will play this season with the Drummondville Voltigeurs of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

Acquired part way through last season in a trade with the Orangeville Flyers, DaSilva was named to the Ontario Hockey Association's Top Prospect First Team and to the OJHL's Second All-Star squad.

Where the Spirit could be fragile to start the season is up front as they will be minus the services of five veterans due to an assortment of injuries.

Sitting on the sidelines are Chad Burrows, Jackson Savery, Stefan Palitsiadis, Jack Varga and Kyle Thomas.

Perrin said each is expected to be out for an indefinite period.

The Spirit hope to fill that void after they recently signed four rookies including: Thomas Tinmouth, James Waldron, Tyler Kulba and

Beau Binnie.

A 16-year-old Richmond Hill resident, Tinmouth was a fourth-round draft pick of the Ottawa 67's in this year's Ontario Hockey League priority selection and had 25 goals and 35 assists in 58 contests with the Toronto Marlies minor midgets last season.

INJURED FORWARDS

He was also identified to play in Hockey Canada's under-17 program during the offseason.

"We might be challenged to score goals at the start of the year," Perrin conceded.

For the Spirit to be successful in the early going, he anticipated they will have to limit the opposition's scoring chances and capitalize on what opportunities are presented to them in the offensive end.

In other words, they will have to be involved in low-scoring affairs to be in contention.

"The key for us to start the year will be our goaltending," Perrin said. "That will keep us in games and I think that will happen."

"Our team will be competitive and they've shown that all through the preseason."

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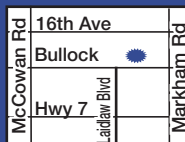
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