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Eight bantam skaters chosen in OHL draft

Total of eleven local players selected by teams in province's top junior league

By Robb Swybrous

SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

By now you'd think Oakville Rangers bantam AAA coach Scott McKenzie was as impressed with his team as any coach could be.

After all his group of players wrapped up their third straight Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) title this season and earned a silver medal at the all-Ontario championships in March.

But after last weekend's Ontario Hockey League (OHL) Priority draft, McKenzie says his players have taken it to another level.

Eight of the Rangers were selected into the province's top junior league, including both of the team's goalies — Chris Rowan and Matt Pike.

"The guys went who I thought would," McKenzie said. "Both goaltenders went which I thought was really good. It's got to be pretty unusual to have both goalies drafted."

Rowan was selected in the sixth round by the Barrie Colts, while Pike was drafted in the 10th round by the Saginaw Spirits.

In addition to the team's puck-stoppers,

defence-man Ben Heersink was chosen by the Windsor Spitfires in the fifth round;

twins Tyler and Justin Donati were taken by the Oshawa Generals in the sixth and 15th rounds respectively; Charlie Giffin was chosen in the eighth round by the Owen Sound Attack; Brad McKenzie

went to the Spitfires in the 11th round and Nick Davis is now property of the Ottawa 67's who chose him in the 12th round.

As per OHL rules only a team's top two draft picks each year are eligible to play the next season in the OHL.

That means none of the bantam-aged players can suit up for an OHL club next season but McKenzie is pretty sure at least a few of his former players will be skating in the league during the 2003-04 season.

"I think probably Chris Rowan has a really good shot and Heersink's a real solid defence-man. He's six-two and can really move the puck," he said. "(And) Tyler Donati — he lit it up this year, he had a tremendous year."

Having eight players selected to the OHL means McKenzie will leave a tremendous legacy on Oakville minor hockey.

The veteran bench boss is turning in his clipboard and hanging up his skates this season.

Unprecedented draft

The bantam squad was well represented at the draft but when you add in the other Oakville-based players chosen, it turned out to be an unprecedented draft for this town's players.

In addition to the eight bantam

players, three other Oakville skaters were chosen.

Evan McGrath who played for the Oakville Blades this year was taken in the first round (12th overall) by the Kitchener Rangers.

T. Donati

• Oshawa Generals

Heersink

• Windsor Spitfires

McKenzie

• Windsor Spitfires



Davis

• Ottawa 67's



Pike

• Saginaw Spirits



J. Donati

• Oshawa Generals



Rowan

• Barrie Colts



Giffin

• Owen Sound Attack

Priority draft isn't the only thing that has Oakville (MOHA) rep hockey officials excited.

Great day for Rangers' hockey

The organization is also set to welcome back a crop of hometown skaters to play in the MOHA system for the 2002-03 year.

Many of the returnees are players who previously skated with an Oakville club but left to play with teams in the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL).

"Obviously they must be comfortable with our program and philosophy

or they wouldn't be here," Keith Murray, MOHA Town Rep vice-president, said. "We are very pleased that these players have chosen to come home to Oakville to continue their hockey careers. This is a great day for Oakville Rangers' hockey."

Heading the list of returning players is Luke Moodie, who played last year with the North York Rangers in the GTHL but has signed to skate with Oakville's bantam AAA squad this year.

Joining Moodie on the bantam team will be Scott Hamel, Domenico Monardo and Daniel Ruffo.

Each earned an all-Ontario championship last season with the GTHL's Junior Canadians.

Oakville's minor bantam AAA squad will welcome Jordan Watts for next season after a one-year hiatus to play with the Mississauga Senators.

Michael Ide is also re-joining the Oakville rep system and will play with the minor bantam AAA team after playing three years in Mississauga.

The midget AAA's are expecting Andrew Antidormi to bolster their lineup and the peewee AAA's are hoping for big things from former Wexford Raiders' player Andrew Neuwald.

Joining the peewee AA team for

2002-03 are Dylan Mac-Dougall and Dylan Ellis. Ryan Zurawell and Daniel Tremblay join the

minor bantam AA.

At the single-A level, Daniel McRae joins the bantam team, while Eric Carr will lace up for the minor midget team.



Barrie Erskine • Oakville Beaver

An Oakville Coyotes player (white) tries to fend off a Burlington Wave defender while the Wave goaltender makes a save. The Coyotes got two goals from rookie Jeff Brown in an 8-6 win Sunday at Oakville Arena. The Coyotes next home game is Friday at 8 p.m. against Brampton.

Coyotes counting on locals

GM thinks Oakville players will make difference

Tired of searching all over the province for the right mix of players, Oakville Coyotes general manager Jay Labelle started looking in his own backyard. After all, says Labelle, Oakville's pool of young, talented hockey players is as good as another other town in the province.

"In the past couple of years we've had a lot of out-of-town-guys, a lot of OHL guys," Labelle said. "But it just never jelled. This year we went with completely local guys. And the fact that we had a really good group of young guys coming up through the system allowed us to do that"

Labelle's focus on home-grown talent is already paying off. The team opened its Provincial Junior A roller hockey league season Sunday at Oakville Arena with an 8-6 win over the Burlington Wave.

And it was one of those local guys leading the way.

Rookie Jeff Brown lead all scores with three goals and one assist and made a great first-impression on GM Labelle.

"Some rookies take a game or two or sometimes even a season to acclimatize themselves to the quickness of the Junior A level," he said. "Brown took a half."

Other Coyotes scoring in the win were veteran Luke Domski with two goals, Shaun Dakin with a goal and two helpers, Kelly Vietch and Dan Rosso with singles.

Ryan Kuri also played a strong game chipping in with a couple of assists.

The Coyotes had a slim 3-2 half-time lead but came out in the second half and took it to Burlington early netting five goals in the first 10 minutes of the second half.

Goalie Sean Tompa played well in the game's final 10 minutes to preserve the win.

Labelle said coach Kevin Vietch will be relying on Tompa

as well as Brett Edwards to provide the goaltending this season.

The team's defence will be anchored by veteran Mike Zack while Domski, Rosso and Geoff Aselstine will be counted on to provide some scoring punch.

It was just the start Labelle was looking for from his team that has been a middle-of-the-pack achiever in the past couple of seasons.

Considering the team is made up of 11 rookies, Labelle admits his expectations aren't sky-high but his ready to be proved wrong.

"When you have three or four returning guys you can't expect too much," he said. "To be honest I'd probably be happy with middle of the pack but I think we'll probably out-do my expectations. We're pretty pumped about it."

Their next home game is scheduled for Friday at Oakville Arena against the Brampton Radicals. Game time is 8 p.m.

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