



AND THEY'RE OFF: Pictured left to right, Oakville Speed Skating Club members Evan MacHattie, Sydney MacDonald and Taylor Amos take off from the starting line of their race at last weekend's Western Regional meet at River Oaks Recreation Centre.

Five local winners at speed skating meet

Skating on home ice agreed with five Oakville Speed Skating Club athletes last weekend.

Alex Giannotti, Paige Buchanan, Zoe O'Neill, Conor McNamee and Sean McAnuff each won their divisions at the fourth Western Regional meet of the speed skating season, held Sunday at River Oaks Recreation Centre.

Divisions were determined by skaters' previous times in the 500-metre distance, not age. The meet featured 16 divisions and 219 skaters, 76 of those skaters from the host club. Teams from

Hamilton, Durham, Newmarket, Niagara, Brampton, Cambridge, Milton, Kawartha, Sault Ste. Marie, Toronto, Clarington, Barrie, Markham and London also participated.

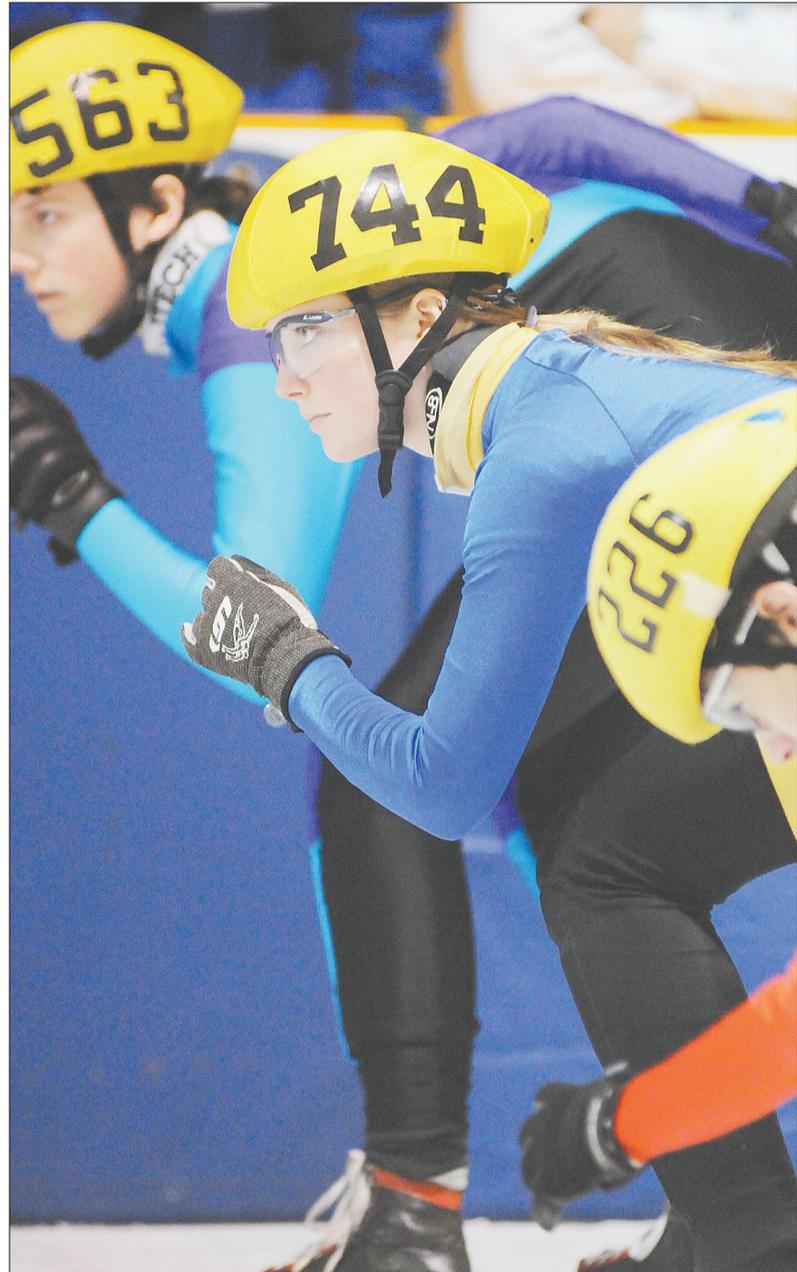
Edouard Parent, Samiah Dhingra, Christopher Gemmell and Katie Quesnelle were the local skaters to produce second-place finishes, while Natalie Skov, Abby O'Neill, William Malcolm, Gabriel Patron and Ryan McAnuff earned bronze medals.

Other local skaters to finish in the top five of their divisions

included Samuel St. James, Christopher Sturino, Daniel Nelson, Mitchell Kothleitner, Graeme Tickner, Graeme Stewart, Gabrielle Kennific, Sophie McNamee, Rebecca St. James, Cassandra Boychuk, Anaka Will-Dryden and Reaves Christie.

Michael Lowrey highlighted a group of local skaters that achieved personal bests, breaking the 60-second mark in the 500m distance for the first time.

Kyle Van Bavel and Kennific were competing in their first-ever meet.



PHOTOS BY NIKKI WESLEY / OAKVILLE BEAVER

ON HER MARK: Oakville's Sara McNamara (helmet 744) is a study in concentration as she waits for the starting gun in her race.

Monardo returns from broken neck to lead Aurora

■ By John Cudmore
METROLAND MEDIA GROUP

Domenic Monardo had a unique perspective of the Oakville Blades' run to the Dudley Hewitt Cup championship and Royal Bank Cup appearance last season.

It wasn't exactly the way he might have envisioned, simply being along for the ride. But he had little choice after suffering a broken neck earlier in the season during an Ontario Provincial Jr. A Hockey League game against the Hamilton Red Wings.

Remarkably, the 20-year-old has bounced back to play this season, serving as captain of the Aurora Tigers and looking for a more hands-on manner by which to help his team again reach deep into the playoffs.

It was in the Blades' 14th game of the 2007-08 season when the Oakville resident was felled by a check from behind by a Hamilton player to begin a scary period of his life. Monardo, the Blades' top scorer at the time, suffered a broken C-2 vertebrae which contains a major blood vessel to the

brain.

"I kind of felt like I was in a parenting role, telling guys what they were doing right and wrong," recalled Monardo.

"Everyone is focused on getting points but if you play well as a team, more people will be watching you later in the season. After watching the playoffs and RBC, I saw what it takes to go all the way."

Anxious to get back into the Blades' lineup when doctors cleared him to play ahead of schedule on Feb. 14, Monardo found himself at odds when management was reluctant to let him play. It led to his asking out in the off-season.

"I didn't see eye-to-eye with the coaching staff. I needed a fresh start after all that happened in Oakville," said the 20-year-old, who leads the Tigers in scoring this year with 32 goals and 34 assists in 40 games. "Oakville wanted me for the next year."

He ended up in Aurora playing for then-head coach Jerome Dupont, with whom he was familiar through his minor hockey career.

"I've always been impressed with his game," said Dupont, who left Aurora two months ago to coach the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League's Gatineau Olympiques. "Last year, he hit a bit of bad luck and this was a chance to get a boy on the rebound. He's definitely a team player. And a personable kid, too."

Monardo said the player who hit him into the boards, Red Wings defenceman Steve Spade, later called to explain there was no intent to injure.

While still cognizant of what can happen on the ice, Monardo knows what can happen in the blink of an eye.

"For me, it's the opposite after getting hit," he explained. "It got me wanting to play more than ever, especially when the doctors said I might not play again."

Doctors initially wanted to operate, but Monardo ended up avoiding surgery. He was outfitted for a soft collar and neck brace for four to six months, but was out of it within three months.

"Any hit from behind brings it back, but

I'm not scared," said Monardo. "Obviously, I'm always cautious. It is in the back of my mind, but I'm not letting it show. Something just told me it was not the end of hockey for me."

"I don't think of myself as an inspiration. I look at it more as perseverance and to go after what you want."

■ Domenic Monardo

Dupont saw a player who was keen to show the hockey world he is capable physically, mentally and skill-wise of going on to the next level.

"He proved he's committed," said Dupont. "The time off probably got him to be more motivated."

"There's always a concern with that sort of injury, but he was cleared by doctors. There's risks in everything you do. He's taken some intense hits and been able to bounce back."

Despite bouncing back from such serious injury, Monardo sees himself as no different than other players.

"Everyone has experienced a check from behind, either hitting or having been hit," he said. "It is serious, but I don't think of myself as an inspiration. I look at it more as perseverance and to go after what you want."



Domenic Monardo