

Local Sports

Jr B Rockets busy training in advance of new year

by Kyle MacKinnon

STRATHROY - It may just be early September but the Greater Ontario Junior Hockey League is already deep into their preseason.

Again the Strathroy Rockets are coming into camp as one of the top teams in the league. According to league sources Strathroy, the London Nationals and the Sarnia Legionnaires will be the teams to beat this upcoming season.

Strathroy Rockets

After a disappointing end to a strong 2009-2010 campaign the Rockets again look like winners.

Speed, scoring and defense are some of the characteristics the Rockets boast heading into the season.

Their main issue last year was the fact that the Rockets didn't have enough grit to sustain a successful playoff year.

General Manager Danny Gibson and his staff believe that they have addressed this issue in camp.

The Rockets will have many veterans in camp, making them a stronger team with great leadership as they look forward to this season.

The only real question will be between the pipes. It appears that this might be the only real issue the

Rockets will have to address.

Lambton Predators

Its hard to come off a six win season on a positive note, but the Predators are looking to make the playoffs for the first time in four years since moving from Petrolia.

With a new coaching staff, first year head coach Jonathan Taylor said this season his club needs to make the playoffs.

One of the big issues that the Predators have is that not very many players want to play for a club that doesn't win.

"We only had 25 players at our mini camp," the first year coach told The Middlesex Banner.

"Hard to compete with teams like London and Strathroy who have 150."

The Forest based team will be competing with St. Marys and a couple other teams for the 8th and final playoff spot.

With no 20 year-olds it will be an uphill battle for the club. But if the team could string a couple wins together and slide into that 8th spot the players will come and Lambton will have a chance to be better down the road.

London Nationals

Like the Rockets and the Legionnaires, the London Nationals will be a strong competitive team.

Using the big home ice, the Nationals will be fast, period.

With one of the biggest ice surfaces in the league the Nationals usually put together a fast, skilled team that can score in bunches.

This season will be no different. With many veterans returning last years top team will once again have a giant target on their jersey.

Toughness may be the one chink in the Nationals armor. Teams will be able to battle them along the boards.

Sarnia Legionnaires

The team with the highest attendance in the league must continue to keep fans in their seats after a disappointing season last year.

Former Sarnia Sting head coach and NHL player Jeff Perry now has a year under his belt in the GOJHL and now knows what it takes to win, which is scary for every other team in the League.

He has a lot of veterans returning to the ice and his top line should put up a combined 180 point season.

The gritty team will be hard to beat in Sarnia as always. Goaltend-



ing is again the question. The once blue chip prospect Kyle Washer will have every opportunity to win the number one job once again, but quick reflexes can't always counteract poor rebound control.

Expect the Legionnaires, Rockets

and Nationals to finish top three in the division.

The Middlesex Banner will preview LaSalle, Chatham, St. Thomas, St. Marys and Leamington in next week's edition.

Unexpected visits to Victory Lane, & first-time win!

DELAWARE - In the last race night before the Great Canadian Race weekend, front-runners didn't make their way to Victory Lane but one driver did get his first experience in the winner's circle.

Dion Verhoeven (77) started out front of the NASCAR Late Model field and within a half-lap he had the top points leaders on his tail; Scott Lindsay (20) in second and Ron Sheridan (52) third. Sharpie's yellow flag went up at lap 5 for a spin out on turns one and two by the 72 of Shawn Thompson.

Mark Watson (78), Andrew Gresel (81) Steve Robblee (28) completed the six-pack out front.

At lap 10, Watson overtook Sheridan, who slipped back to sixth within another lap, just behind Robblee. By the halfway mark, Verhoeven and Lindsay were a tight one and two up front but Watson caught up and shrunk the gap until lap traffic at lap 21 nearly cost Verhoeven his lead.

At lap 24 a bunch of cars got caught up in a spin on the front straightaway - Jamie Grover (33), Terry Jacques (35) and Jay Doer (43) found themselves turned around and creating a blockage on the track. Lindsay was able to knock off some dangling material from the #20 dur-

ing the caution and didn't have to pit. But at lap 26, Lindsay and Robblee connected and Lindsay's car struck hard into the cement off turn three and nearly went airborne. He was out of the car quickly to show he was fine but the vehicle didn't fare as well. Robblee was black-flagged for this incident but instead of going to the back of the field, he drove to the pit area and parked. Doer also came in for the evening. Mark Watson moved into second place for the short-lived because of trouble on turn four involving Jamie Cox (00), Marc Jacobs (08) and Rick Emery (14).

Yellow again at lap 27 for Matt Box (27) and Shawn Thompson (72) where the 72 ended up with some right front damage.

On this restart, Gresel got a length up on Watson for second and Cole Powell (25) moved into fourth with Sheridan tracking fifth. Although Gresel got a nose under Verhoeven on the last time around turn 3, Verhoeven got the win. Gresel ended up second followed by Powell, Sheridan and Watson.

Jake Ott, ranked 6th in points at the start of the night and coming off several weeks of bad luck, had the pole in the Delaware Super Stocks feature. By the 6th lap, Ott had clean

air with Darrell Lake (77), Jason Lidster (11) and Jared Shields (07) fighting for second and third. Lake had second and near the half-way point, Lidster took it away.

At lap 15 the points leader, Kris Lawrence, (28) called it a night with problems in the car's rear end. It looked to be a great night to gain points for second-place driver Lidster but trouble hit him late in the race. Ott had a full straightaway lead on the pack and Lake had grabbed back second place from Lidster at lap 20. At lap 23 Lidster's 11 lost a tire and the car spun out on the front straightaway. The tire continued on to the billboards between turns one and two before bouncing into the infield. Lidster waved to cheers from the 11 as it was towed off the track. Steve Smith (84) moved into third.

Another caution shortly after the restart: the cause was unclear but Matt Humphrys (04) ended up with some damage and needed a tow. Jared Shields (07) hit a tire at turn four but limped off the track without a yellow having to fly. Ott's domination of the race continued right to the checkered flag and his first trip to Victory Lane. Darrell Lake finished second and Steve Smith third. Paul Fothergill was fourth and Scott

Nagy, fifth.

The Demar Aggregates Trucks feature got in 3 laps before the first caution and a driver to end his night on a Whitworth Towing hook.

Gary Triska (57) had the pole and the 16 of Chad Riejen overtook him in the second lap. Jeff Showler (56) moved into second pushing Triska to third as Shawn Johns (00) caught up with Matt Koricina (93). Johns was towed off but Koricina was back out for green however he didn't finish the race.

Showler made several attempts to go high on Reijen as the two trucks broke away from the rest of the field. By lap 8 points leader Paul Fothergill, had worked his way up from 12th to third position and Triska was out of the top five. At lap 10, Showler started experiencing cornering problems and started to slip in the line-up, allowing Fothergill to move into second with Devon Bloemendal (01) third.

Caution at lap 13 for debris on the speedway. Jeff Showler used the yellow to make a quick visit to the pits and rejoined the race in time for green.

It was Reijen and Fothergill in a tight duo out front with Bloemendal, McCaw and Gary Adrieansen (55) rounding out the top five. At

lap 18, McCaw made his move and claimed third while Fothergill repeatedly tried the high side to get past Riejen. They took most of the last lap side by side but Riejen hung on and won the race. Fothergill ended second, McCaw third, Showler fourth and Bloemendal fifth.

The Transmission Direct Enduro Challenge was missing the division's points leader, David McCullough. Bill Brekelmens (88) was the pole-sitter and led a lap before Jim Fergusson (06) took over. At lap 13, the most recent Enduro winner, Jeremiah Rabideau (5) took the lead and soon created a multi-car-length lead for himself. At lap 18, some contact involving the leader dropped him down to third and Fergusson reclaimed the lead. Steve Book (64) moved into second. Rabideau grabbed the lead back for a couple of laps until Book got it again at lap 24 and Rabideau leap-frogged over Book again at lap 25.

A tangle on the front straightaway a lap before the end threatened to catch some traffic but everyone went low and avoided it. Jeremiah Rabideau took the checker - his second in a row. Steve Book finished second. Barry Watson, third; Jamie Klumper fourth.

Upsets in 'A' & 'B' finals in Ladies' Slo-Pitch

by Dawn Lyons

POPLAR HILL - The Denfield Ballchasers and the Arva Shooters overcame the heat - from the sun as well as the two top-ranked teams in their league - to win the "A" and "B" Championship games.

The year-end tournament was held 27-28 August at Poplar Hill Park. Denfield faced Biddulph in the "A" final, matching the league's first- and second-ranked teams.

Biddulph put up a fight, getting hits and putting players on base, but it wasn't enough to come back from a fourth inning homerun by Denfield, which brought in four runs. Biddulph rallied with some strong defensive play in the following innings to keep the Denfield players away from home plate, but without their own players rounding the bases, Biddulph was not able to close the gap and took the 12-5 loss.

The Denfield team was pleased to add a third win to their run as number one in the league, having also won the "A" final in the previous two years. But their cheerful celebration was not boastful.

"We're always happy to play Biddulph in the finals," said Denfield team co-captain Joanne Walls. "We played them last year and always have fun playing with them. They are really good and give us a run for our money; you can never



The Denfield Ballchasers, three-peat league 'A' champions(left) and the Arva Shooters, winners of the "B" championship. The Ladies Slo-Pitch league has been running for many years in rural Middlesex County.

predict a win when we're playing them."

The tournament statistics are indicative of this, as Biddulph entered the "A" final with four wins and zero losses, as opposed to Denfield's three wins and one loss. Denfield's history of "A" final wins can be attributed to a close relationship be-

tween the team members, which allows them to support one another where it is needed and play to one another's strengths.

"Our team has been together for eight or nine years," said Denfield's other co-captain, Ellen Swinkels. "We always cheer each other on and are fortunate to have many home-



run hitters on the team."

In the "B" final, the Ailsa Craig Snappers, who were tied with Biddulph for a first-place overall ranking during the season, faced the Arva Shooters, who held a fourth-place standing.

Both teams had three wins and one loss during the final tourna-

ment, making it a well-matched game.

Losing by one run in the bottom of the seventh inning, Arva team member Janet Gregory-Lange hit a double to upset the Snappers and win the "B" final championship with a score of 10-7.

BANNER/Dawn Lyons