



INDEPENDENT SPORTS



Stratford Silver Knights play home games at PRC



Oxford Warlord goaltender Taylor Shiell turns aside a Silver Knights' scoring chance on Saturday afternoon.



Luke Richardson (#8) of the Oxford Warlords and Owen Dittmer (#5) of the Stratford Silver Knights compete for the puck in ORHL action at the PRC on Saturday afternoon.

By Stewart Grant

There was something different as I entered the Blue Rink at the PRC this past Saturday afternoon. There was no blue.

The St. Marys Rock's dominant colour is blue. So too is the case for Ringette's St. Marys Snipers. The Huron-Perth Lakers hockey teams also have blue in their jerseys.

It felt a little strange to walk into the arena on Saturday and see the Stratford Silver Knights, dressed in black jerseys inspired by the L.A. Kings, take on the Oxford Warlords, whose white jerseys with grey, gold and red trim resemble those of the Vegas Golden Knights.

The colours may have been different but some of the names were familiar. This fast-paced game among Peewee-aged players included six St. Marys-area players. Owen Dittmer and Thijs Paulin patrolled the blue line for the Silver Knights, Taylor Shiell tended goal for the Warlords, while Ian Patridge, Riley Hartwick and Luke Richardson skated for the Oxford club.

Both teams play in the Ontario Rep Hockey League ("ORHL"), also referred to informally as a "rogue" league as it is an independent hockey league that is not sanctioned by Hockey Canada. Instead, it is sanctioned under the Amateur Athletic Union, an amateur sports organization based in the United States. The Oxford Warlords (18-3-3), who are based out of Woodstock, are

currently in first-place in the 13-team league, while the Silver Knights (15-2-6) are in second. Other teams are based out of London, Kitchener, Hamilton, Milton, Halton, Carlyle, and Brantford.

This is the second season for the Silver Knights, explained head coach John Hruden. All home games and practices for the team are in St. Marys.

"St. Marys has an excellent facility with an amazing staff (at the PRC)," says Hruden, who hinted that the idea of his new team wasn't entirely welcomed in Stratford.

"The Silver Knights are another option for players that are looking for somewhere else to play hockey," he added. "The ORHL is a young, growing league that is working out the kinks. It has no boundaries so no releases are needed and anyone has the opportunity to tryout and play for any team they want to. Our program has off-ice and on-ice training, and we really try to incorporate a family-style atmosphere to help the kids bond and hopefully make lifelong friends."

Hruden's son, Rem, is a member of the Peewee team. "He's the reason I started the team and continue to put in the time as he has no intention of playing for the Stratford Warriors again due to the strong politics," said Hruden.

Presently, the Peewee team is the only age group represented by the Silver Knights. However, they are looking at expanding to have a Peewee, Ban-

tam and possibly an Atom team next year. In total, the ORHL has just over 40 teams from Novice to Midget.

"I really can't say enough about the great work being done with the Silver Knights," said Mark Paulin, whose son Thijs is in his second season with the club. "We have gotten to see a group of kids that didn't know each other come together and form friendships, gain confidence and grow their love for hockey."

Carol Venn, whose son Luke Richardson plays for Oxford, said that their family has had positive experiences with both the ORHL and OMHA, of which the St. Marys Minor Hockey Association is a part, but Luke wanted to give the new league a try after speaking with a friend who played last season.

"The ORHL seems to be a fantastic alternative to the OMHA for kids who desire a different hockey experience," said Venn. "Both leagues provide excellent hockey but have slightly different philosophies. We are really happy that Luke has had the opportunity to play in the ORHL this season."

Blue certainly remains the primary colour in the St. Marys minor hockey scene, but we wouldn't be doing our job at the newspaper if we didn't acknowledge the other jersey colours across the growing spectrum.