

Wolves win league championship in dramatic shootout

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

As playoff hockey goes, it had just about everything. High-energy, end-to-end action, big saves, a late-game comeback, three periods of overtime – including a penalty shot, a shootout, then a joyful celebration for one team, heartbreak for the other after more than 55 minutes of play.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves U11 rep team, a force all season but second to the Thorold Blackhawks in the standings, beat Thorold 3-2 Tuesday night at Centennial Arena to capture the Niagara District Hockey League championship.

With a raucous crowd packing the bleachers, cheering on their respective teams, NOTL was down 1-0 to start the third period and then 2-0 when Thorold notched another.

“Before the third period started, I told the team if they won that period, they’d win the game. Well, they won it but then we went to overtime,” head coach Joe Pagnotta said afterward.

Charlie Rowaan narrowed the gap with NOTL’s first goal and then Eil Perng tied it up late in the third to force OT.

One 10-minute frame settled nothing – though there was plenty of drama.

NOTL goalie Mason Nichols stopped a penalty shot after a teammate handled the puck in the crease. The penalty shot save was a precursor of what was to come in the shootout.

After five minutes of 4-on-4 hockey and five more with three skaters a side, the game went to a three-player shootout.

NOTL’s Luke Simpson, who led the league in points this year, was the game’s hero, as he was the only shooter to find the net.

After Nichols stopped Thorold’s final attempt, the arena erupted, with NOTL players, coaches, parents and fans embracing and cheering.

“Both goalies played phenomenally,” Pagnotta said. And his team never gave up.

Winning the Niagara District championship is just the latest accomplishment for this NOTL squad.

They ousted Thorold previously to qualify for the prestigious Ontario Minor Hockey Association championships on Easter Week-end in Barrie, then had to play the Blackhawks again this week in a winner-take-all league final.

Pagnotta was impressed how is team dealt with the adversity they faced against a tough opponent, especially since they’re next going up against seven of the top teams in their age group from across Ontario.

After the big win, it was time to soak it all in.

“They were on cloud nine last night,” said Pagnotta.

“It was it was fun to see, to be part of and I reminded them it’s something that they’ll remember the rest of their lives regardless of our outcome going forward. It’s something they’ll talk about forever.”

Now, with more than a week until their next scheduled game (first up in Barrie is the Mount Brydges Cougars on Good Friday morning), Pagnotta is hoping to arrange an exhibition game or maybe some practices.



Top: Miller Davis (#18) fires a shot on Thorold’s goaltender while teammate Ben Bayne (#11) cruises in looking for a rebound. Below: Luke Simpson, the league’s top point-getter, scores what turns out to be the winning goal during the shootout. Bottom: Tuesday’s championship win won’t soon be forgotten. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



“Rest is not a bad thing. We don’t want to overwhelm them. We’ve played a lot of hockey this season. But we don’t have to go every day,” he said.

The Wolves haven’t lost a game in the playoffs, dating back to mid-February, so the team is looking forward to riding that eight-game streak into the OMHA tournament.

No matter what happens in Barrie, they have a lifetime of memories from Tuesday night’s victory.



Badminton club seeks new members ahead of next season



David Taylor winds up to send the birdie back. EVAN LOREE

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake men’s senior badminton club is looking to fill out its roster with a few more players for next season.

And it’s offering free sessions in April to try to recruit newcomers.

Club president Brian Law took over the club after former president Ted Little left in December.

“In the past, we’ve filled three courts,” Law said.

A club member for about four years, Law remembers

before the pandemic there were almost 35 members.

After lockdowns, the membership had dwindled to closer to five.

The club now has grown to about 15 members, half of what it was before the pandemic.

“This coming year, we’re going to start with two courts,” Law said.

Neil Robinson, who has been playing with the club for about a year, said they need at least 20 players if they’re going to use three courts next season.

The club’s average turnout is about eight to 12 players,

Robinson said.

Sessions run from October to April and members pay \$150 for the season, but new members can play for free this April as part of an effort to boost membership in time for next fall.

“We cater to all levels of play,” Law said.

The club mostly serves men over 50 as it gets a discount on court rentals so long as the majority of the club is over 50.

While Law and Robinson said it’s a casual club, Law said some games can get “quite competitive.”

“For those that really

play, even in doubles, you really get a good workout.” He added. “It’s a pretty fast game.”

They don’t hold tournaments but members often go for post-match lunches and other social outings.

The players say the social aspect of the club is as important as the actual games.

Sessions are every Monday and Friday from 10:30 to 12:30 in the auditorium of the community centre.

The club is open to all men over 50. Anyone interested in playing can contact Law at brianlaw1828@gmail.com or by phone at 289-630-1828.