

Central York Junior Panthers earn their way to 'The Final Four' at the OWSA Provincials

The Central York U22 AA Panthers played their best hockey of the season over a four-day period at the Ontario Championships in Mississauga from April 13-16.

The Junior Panthers kicked off their quadrant of the tournament draw by winning Pool C with a record of 2-1.

On Thursday night, Central York defeated the Bluewater Hawks 4-1.

Although they were edged 2-1 by the Cambridge Rivulettes on Friday morning, the Panthers rallied on Friday night to shutout the Whitby Wolves 3-0 and eliminated their 'nemesis of late' from the Provincials.

The shutout and elimination of the Wolves avenged a semi-final loss earlier in the month at the U22 Elite League Championship tournament.

The Panthers rolled confidently into the weekend after their win over Whitby and proceeded to eliminate the Elite League gold medal winners'the London Devilettes'with a hard-fought 3-2 quarter final victory. With their big win over London, the Panthers carried their 3-1 record in Mississauga into a semi-final berth on Sunday morning versus the Durham West Lightning.

Eliminating this year's silver medalists (Whitby) and gold medalists (London) took a significant physical toll on the Panthers as a number of players were hobbled with untimely injuries. However, the sky seemed to be the limit for the prowling Panthers with momentum on their side versus Durham West.

Sadly, the elation of Saturday dimmed to disappointment on Sunday. For all intents and purposes, the Panthers' season came to a crushing end in the semifinal as the Lightning defeated our valiant local gals 6-2.

The Panthers then limped into the bronze medal game'seemingly spent by the Athenean effort needed to eliminate Whitby and London in consecutive games'and fell in the consolation final 6-1 to the bronze medal-winning Burlington Barracudas.

A second consecutive Final Four finish was met with some degree of disappointment by the team after their win over a London team that featured five Team Canada players, but the Junior Panthers did assert themselves in April.

Their goal in both the season-ending April tournaments was to 'Play on Sunday'--the battle cry of any championship-calibre team. The team should be proud of a season that was 'oh so close' and filled with program growth, team victories, and notable individual accomplishments.

Five Panther teams made it to quarterfinals at OWSA championships across the province'each earning Top 8 status in Ontario.

By Jim Stewart