

Central York U22 Junior Panthers skate into 2024 to 'Leave a Legacy of Excellence'?



The U22 Central York Panthers skated to an impressive 26-10-2 overall record during the first half of their 2023-24 season and earned a silver medal at the US-Canada Cup in Waterloo in early-December.

The Junior Panthers—who rank third in the OWHL with a 16-6-2 record —lost in OT in the gold medal game to the first-place Etobicoke Dolphins.

The Dolphins are the #1-ranked team in Canada.

CYGHHA President Mark Dubeau couldn't be happier about the U22 team's performance heading into 2024.

'We are very happy with our record after having 14 players graduate to university hockey last year. [It's] almost a complete rebuild. We have also been missing as many as five players at any one time due to injuries—unfortunately, one of them was season-ending. We have never been able to field our full team and [we're] still in the top three in the league right now.'

Coach Dubeau sees a silver lining in terms of coping systemically with all the injuries that have afflicted the Panthers in 2023-24.

'It's allowed us to call up from our U18 program and develop more kids.'

In addition to developing more players at the Junior level, the high-performance hockey organization has been busy finding schools for its players as nine Panthers have committed to university hockey programs in 2024-25.

Dubeau noted that, 'so far, we have eight NCAA Division I commitments and one USports commitment. We'll be doing a recognition ceremony for our committed and graduating players at the end of the season.'

Although Head Coach Steve Dempsey and Assistant Coach Dubeau have seen excellent individual efforts from their Junior Panthers both in league and tournament play, they preferred to delineate the notable collective performances from the first half of the season.

'We played very well in the USA-Canada Cup in Waterloo in early December,' Dubeau noted. 'It was a 38-team tournament. We won our division and made it to the gold medal game. We lost in OT to the #1 Canadian-ranked Etobicoke Dolphins. Silver medal for us.'

While he saw the silver medal in Waterloo as an important accomplishment, Dempsey extolled the effectiveness of his team's prolific offence and stellar defence.

?We've been scoring nearly 4 GPG and we've got seven players in the Top 50 in league scoring. Defensively, we're allowing less than 2 GPG. Both our goalies are in the Top 15 in the league in goals against average, and better than .900 save pct.?

In addition to these sparkling team and individual statistics, the Panthers have big events coming up in the New Year.

Dubeau gave us a timely promotional preview: ?CYGHA is hosting the International Silver Stick tournament from February 2-4 for U15, U11, and U9 age groups. There will be 60 teams from Canada and the USA. The closing event on Sunday will be the U9 showcase followed by a U22 OWHL game. The Junior Panthers will be the Mississauga Hurricanes on Sunday, February 4 at SARC at 4.25 p.m. There will also be a 50/50 draw supporting CYGHA and 360 kids. The link to the 50/50 draw is www.rafflebox.ca/raffle/central-york-panthers.?

When asked if the team had a New Year's resolution, the amiable CYGHA President and U22 Panthers' Assistant Coach mentioned that the Juniors ?need to be more consistent, reach our full potential, and leave a legacy of excellence for our younger Panthers.?

The U22 Panthers look to continue their legacy of excellence when they host two OWHL games next weekend. The Panthers pounce on the London Devilettes on Saturday, January 13 at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex at 1.45 p.m. and the Nepean Wildcats at SARC on Sunday, January 14 at 1.15 p.m.

By Jim Stewart