

York Oldtimers Hockey League celebrates 50th year with season-ending tournament at ACC

The York Oldtimers Hockey League celebrated the end of its 50th year of operation with a spirited four-team, six-game tournament at the Aurora Community Centre on Saturday afternoon.

The four squads?comprised of a range of players from the League's 70+, 60+, 50+, and 35+ divisions?played three 38-minute games in a display of skill, endurance, and sportsmanship.

Mayor Tom Mrakas presided over the ceremonial faceoff and applauded the indomitable spirit of the 45 skaters: ?It was truly inspiring. Seeing these players lace up and compete in three games in one afternoon speaks to their passion for the game, and their commitment to staying active. It's not just about hockey?it's about community, friendship, and a lifelong love of sport.?

Mayor Mrakas also praised the YOHL for its decades-long positive impact on the Town.

?The York Oldtimers Hockey League's 50-year legacy is incredibly important to Aurora. Few organizations can say they've been bringing residents together for half a century. It's a testament to the strength of our community, the role sport plays in keeping people connected, and the traditions that make Aurora such a great place to live.?

YOHL Convenor and Secretary-Treasurer Stephen Forsey reinforced the importance of the connections and love of hockey to which Mayor Mrakas alluded: ?Everybody's having fun. That's the objective. It's also about celebrating that we've been around for 50 years. 375 players. 26 teams. I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate than to mix up the teams with teammates playing against teammates.?

Forsey, who has served on the League's Executive for over 30 years, said he liked what he saw on the ice as we chatted behind the visitors' bench.

He emphasized the significance of sportsmanship at the tournament and working with new teammates.

?I reminded everyone that these are exhibition games?if you can make the extra pass to a new teammate, do it.?

Forsey's own team made the extra pass all afternoon en route to a pristine 3-0 record and the unofficial tournament championship. Skating as the Yellow squad and bedecked in classic Bruins colours of yellow, black, and white, the mix of players captured their first game of the tournament 4-2 over the Blue team sporting the traditional Oilers colours of blue, orange, and white.

In their second game, the Bruins defeated the White squad?sporting vintage St. Louis Blues jerseys sponsored by Smith Rogers Financial Inc?2-1 in a barn burner of a hockey game that was made even better by Yan's world-famous popcorn procured in the lobby of ACC2.

Forward Paul Ruytenbeek finished a nifty passing play and backhanded a rebound past Blues goaltender Wayne Wong to stake the Bruins to a 1-0 lead nine minutes into the contest.

The Blues squad tied it on a nice individual effort by Russ Barfitt who took a pass between the circles, fired the puck, and tucked in his own rebound to deadlock the contest 1-1 at the 22:49 mark of the 38-minute run-time game.

With 1:05 left in the spirited tilt, Eric Grant snapped a puck from the blue line that was deftly deflected by Brad Kane over the fallen tender and into the back of the cage for the game-winning tally.

With no rest for the wicked and only the time of an ice flood to catch their breath, the Bruins squad skated in the tournament's next

game versus the Blackhawks ? a squad looking for its first win.

The surging Blackhawks struck first ten minutes into the match, but YOHL Convenor Forsey tapped in a bouncing puck at the left side of the crease?showing some silky mitts in the process?to tie it 1-1 at the midway point.

With 12 minutes left, Greg Ferguson rifled the puck past the Blackhawks' keeper to stake the Bruins to a 2-1 lead. One minute later, Dan Bernardo lifted one over the Blackhawks defenders from the edge of the crease to extend the Bruins' margin to 3-1.

The Blackhawks capitalized on a power play goal to narrow their deficit to 3-2, but Kane fired two goals in the waning moments. The high-scoring forward sniped a puck low glove side to restore the Bruins' two-goal lead with 4:44 left.

With 3:15 on the clock, Kane's wrist shot went bar down and bulged the twine to give the undefeated Bruins a commanding 5-2 lead.

The Blackhawks fought valiantly and slipped one past Bruins' goaltender Brent Beard with 1:08 left to play to make it 5-3, but the hard-pressing team's comeback attempt came up a little short.

The sixth and final game of the tournament pitted the white-clad Blues (1-1) versus the blue-clad Oilers (1-1). The Oilers were looking to build on their narrow 1-0 win over the Blackhawks earlier in the afternoon.

In the Oilers' second game of the tournament, forward Bill Otton banged in a rebound on the power play with ten minutes on the clock to provide the knockout punch versus the Blackhawks.

However, in the Oilers' third and final game versus the Blues, the evenly-matched teams skated to a 0-0 tie that was preserved by a sensational stack-the-pads save by Oilers' netminder Brandon Mailhot with 2:30 left in regulation to send the squads to a shootout.

In the shootout, Mailhot repelled all three shooters he faced and Alain Boudreau fired the game-winner in the second round to give the Oilers their narrow 1-0 win to wrap up the tournament and the League's fiftieth season of operation.

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