

Golden Hawks looking to build on successful season

By Jake Courtepatte

The Caledon Golden Hawks Junior C hockey club had its best season in its six-year existence in 2015-16, winning a playoff series for the very first time.

This year, the amalgamation of eight junior C leagues across Southern Ontario has created a larger, broader challenge for the budding club.

The Georgian Mid-Ontario Hockey League, which Caledon joined in 2010, has become the Carruthers Division of the newly-formed Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL), a massive 65-team league.

Nearly 1,500 players will drop the puck on the inaugural PJHL season this September, though the ex-GMOHL division remains largely untouched. The division remains occupied by the Golden Hawks, Schomberg Cougars, Stayner Siskins, Penetang Kings, Alliston Hornets, Midland Flyers, Huntsville Otters and Orillia Terriers.

Ontario Hockey Association President Karen Phibbs said the new league is part of a rebranding initiative for junior C hockey.

"Our goal is to ensure all players benefit from experiencing high-end hockey as close to home as possible," said Phibbs. "We want to bring players, coaches, scouts, fans, families the opportunity to follow, and develop from, the rich history of junior C hockey."

Though now under the PJHL umbrella, the Golden Hawks' regular season schedule remains rooted in the ex-GMOHL. All regular season games are within the Carruthers Division, with interdivisional play coming to fruition in the postseason race for the Clarence Schmalz Cup.

After besting the Siskins in their first round best-of-seven match in winter of 2016, the Golden Hawks held their own against a strong Kings team, taking the series to seven games before the Kings booked their ticket to the league final.

The Hawks are benefiting from icing a young team last season, with a handful of key returning players. There will be an offensive hole to fill, however, with the departure of over-ager Daniel Cafagna.

Cafagna led the Hawks in scoring last season.

There will also be a new face behind the bench for Caledon, the third bench boss in three seasons.

Stan Kondrotas has taken on the role of head coach, moving on from the Barrie Colts AAA system. Kondrotas brings a ton of experience as a skating coach, having worked closely with ex-Aurora Tigers (and current Mississauga Steelheads) head coach James Richmond.

Sandy Bell returns as general manager.

Once again, it is a strong bet that all teams will be chasing the Hornets, who swept the Kings in the GMOHL final last season. The Hornets have been GMOHL champions eight of the last nine years, losing to Penetang in the 2013-14 final.

Caledon will see the Hornets in Alliston next Friday, but first must battle with the Schomberg Cougars at the Trisan Centre Thursday evening.

The Hawks' home opener is this Sunday at 6:30p.m., hosting the Cougars at the Caledon Community Complex.

Home games will once again run each Sunday at 6:30 p.m.

For stats, schedules, and more information, visit www.jrcgoldenhawks.pointstreaksites.com