

Jr. A Flyers flying the coop

Written By MARK LOCKHART

That's it for Junior A hockey in Orangeville, at least for now.

The Orangeville Junior A Flyers are packing it in and moving the franchise to Brampton.

The team has been re-branded as the Brampton Admirals.

This means Brampton will have two Junior teams playing in the same arena beginning in the 2018 / 19 hockey season.

Owner and president of the Junior A Flyers, David Arsenault, is also the top dog at the Brampton Bombers Junior B organization and both teams will play at Memorial Arena in Brampton.

"The decision to move is part of our commitment to provide hockey at all levels of play and to ensure that players and staff are afforded every opportunity to develop and progress within a framework that allows for junior hockey to survive and thrive in communities across Ontario," Mr. Arsenault said. "This was not an easy decision for the franchise."

The Ontario Junior Hockey League (OJHL) recently announced the decision to allow the move.

OJHL commissioner Marty Savoy spoke about the move at a press conference in Brampton.

"It's unique what the Arsenault hockey group is doing. It's the first time we have done it in our league to have two teams at the same facility. A lot of people say it doesn't work because you have two teams at the same facility. One of the things we're looking for is that there's going to be a lot of synergies between the two clubs from a marketing standpoint, a fan standpoint, and also from a development standpoint with Junior B players able to AP with the big team and back and forth. It's something the League is supporting 100 per cent."

Flyers General Manager, Dana Baker, who has been with the squad since it arrived in Orangeville said several factors figured in the decision to move the team.

"This was a very tough decision for the ownership and a sad day for me. I have grown fond of the Town of Orangeville and the many volunteers and community members who I have become friends with. There are many reasons for the move. The main reasons were the owners desire to have both of his teams in the same facility for both development and business decisions. The other factors obviously are recruiting, ice costs, and of course slumping attendance," Baker said.

The organization came to Orangeville after the original Flyers were decommissioned in 2011 as part of a restructuring and downsizing effort by the League.

The team was previously known as the Villanova Knights and played at the Canlan Ice Gardens at York University before relocating to Orangeville.

The Club had limited success in Orangeville, failing to qualify for the playoffs in three seasons and never really gaining much in the way of support from the town. They averaged only around 100 spectators per game.

Longtime game announcer Mike Van Etten has been the voice at Flyers games for 11 years and was involved with local junior hockey back when the local junior club played at the 'C' level as the Crushers.

"I had heard rumours shortly after the season that the owner had plans on relocating the team to Brampton and shortly after was told

by someone in the OHA that the application was filed. Like others in the organization I found out of the approval through social media and not through the team.?

Mr. Van Etten echoed the sentiment that the town just did not support a Junior level team.

?On average the attendance last season was only 104. Finding people willing to help out with game nights has been increasingly difficult outside of the mainstay volunteers who have been with the team for many years through different owners. The demographic of the town has changed and interest in local Junior hockey continues to decline.?

As with any Junior level hockey club, fan support is crucial to the survival of a organization for both monetary reasons and moral support for players on the ice.

Many junior clubs in Ontario fill their arenas every week to watch the local team play, but Orangeville just didn't muster the numbers to make the club a real success.

Currently there is no indication of any other organization eying Orangeville as a place to bring a junior level team.