

Varsity Thunder roll to ROPSSAA hockey title

Written By **JAKE COUREPATTE**

It was a heavyweight title match in the ROPSSAA Tier one boy's hockey final, and the St. Michael Thunder left the ring as champions.

The Thunder of St. Michael Catholic Secondary School squeaked out a 1 ? 0 victory over Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the region's championship game, held at the CAA Centre in Brampton.

More than three periods of play were needed between the top two teams in the division, with Nicholas Solimena playing the overtime hero for the Thunder by burying the game winner with just over eight seconds left in overtime.

Thunder coach Mark Duchich was proud of his team for picking up the pace after losing a number of high quality players to suspensions and injuries.

?We faced a very good team from Our Lady of Mount Carmel,? said Duchich. ?We played them with a depleted roster?they played a controlled system, only allowing our goalie to face shots from the outside borders of the rink.?

Only in his grade ten year, Domenic Rollo earned the shutout between the pipes for the Thunder.

?Our goalie was key in both this win, posting the shutout victory, and the semi-final win versus St. Martins, an equally good team?we had many leaders step up this year and lead this team by example,? said Duchich, bringing to mind senior players Joseph Burel, Mario Accardo, and Nicholas Sangha.

The Thunder rode their shorthanded bench through a 2 ? 1 win over St. Martins to reach the championship final, after posting 5-2-1 record through the ROPSSAA regular season. Only Our Lady of Mount Carmel finished higher in the five-team Tier 1 division, going 6-1-1: their only loss of the season coming at the hands of the Thunder in the first week of the season.

With the regional championship behind them, Duchich and his squad are gearing up for the provincial OFSAA championship in Barrie later this month.

Despite going up against the top programs in the province, Duchich likes his team's chances, as long as they can maintain ?their focus, their smarts, and their heart and determination.?

?The team has bought into the systems taught by the coaching staff. Although skillfully this isn't the best team to come out of St. Michaels, they are the team that plays with the most cohesiveness....they play as a team, and not for themselves.?

The Thunder open up their schedule on Mar. 20 in a battle with the Collingwood Collegiate Institute Fighting Owls, the winners of the Georgian Bay school board association.