

Junior C teams already preparing for next season

There is always a healthy contingent of Shelburne residents who follow Junior C hockey in the region ? especially since several local players play in teams at the Junior level in Alliston, Stayner, and Mount Forest. The Alliston Junior C Hornets don't get much of a break in the off season. The 2013/ 2014 season ended for the Alliston squad on March 16, when they lost the final Georgian Mid Ontario League championship series in six games to the Penetang Kings, but they are already building for the 2014 / 2015 season. While many turn to summer sports once Spring and Summer leagues start up, the Hornets will be hosting their annual rookie camp starting on June 1, which will be open to 16-18 year old Junior C hopefuls. On the bench, Clay Birkett will be in the top spot as head coach. Birkett, who has been the Club's Director of Hockey Operations for several years, took over coaching duties when former coach Ed Garinger was released in early January. Birkett guided the Hornets through the rest of the season and into a playoff run that saw the squad eliminate the Fergus Devils in four games then dispatch the Stayner Siskins in a four game sweep before heading to the final series against the Penetang Kings. The Kings won the championship but lost in the quarterfinal round of the Provincial championship to the Wingham Ironmen. Joining Birkett on the bench will be assistants Scott Hutchinson and Trevor Belrose. On the management side, long-time General Manager Rick Bartlett will be returning in his role along with former team trainer, Chris Pilon, who stepped in as manager this season and will be returning for the new season. The Hornets won the League Championship for six consecutive seasons from 2008 to 2013 before the loss to Penetang ended their reign as the top dogs in the League. The Provincial Junior C championship is just getting underway with the Essex 73's taking on the Lakefield Chiefs in the final series to determine who will hold the Schmalz Cup for 2014. The 73's were in the final last year but lost to the Picton Pirates.

By Brian Lockhart