

Panthers look to score more in 2007-08

By Josh Lewis

The UPEI Panthers men's hockey team missed the playoffs last season and a lack of offense played a key role, with the squad finishing dead last in the Atlantic University Sport conference in goals per game.

With that in mind, head coach Dylan Taylor went on the hunt for more firepower this summer. He returned with three forwards from the major junior ranks and a potential power play quarterback.

"We felt we needed to build on what we had," said Taylor, who enters his third season behind the Panthers' bench. "The potential for more offense is there. It will take a lot of teamwork and focus. But if we stay true to the program and our values, we can generate enough offense to make it work."

The newcomers include Howie Martin, a centre from the Ontario Hockey League who finished his junior career with the Owen Sound Attack last spring; Vince Scott, a two-way centre from the Sarnia Sting; Greg O'Brien, an Island-born winger who played two seasons with the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League's P.E.I. Rocket; and Czech native Tomas Stryncl, an offensive defenseman who

played three years with the Brampton Battalion.

Taylor also recruited two elite forwards in left winger Mark Derlago, the Western Hockey League's leading goal-scorer last season, and centre Tyler Haskins, a former draft pick of the Detroit Red Wings who racked up 60 assists with the Saginaw Spirit last year.

Both have since jumped to the professional ranks, however, with Derlago signing with the East Coast Hockey

League's Bakersfield Condors and Haskins joining the New York Islanders' American Hockey League affiliate in Bridgeport, Conn.

"Each of the new guys has the potential to provide offense," Taylor said. "Howie Martin's track record indicates he can put up numbers. Vince Scott plays a two-way game and he'll add offense and strong defensive components.

"Greg O'Brien is a player who, over his career, has consistently scored goals and generated offense, while Tomas Stryncl is an offensive-minded defenseman who's demonstrated already an offensive instinct that will improve our hockey team."

Taylor will look to his new recruits to make an impact sooner

rather than later.

"The league is a real step up from the major junior ranks. There'll be an adjustment period, but I'm certain that with the proper focus and work ethic, each of them will make a strong contribution to our team."

The Panthers will also look to improve defensively after finishing seventh in the AUS with more than four goals allowed per game. Stryncl is the latest addition to a blueline which includes returnees Aaron Dawson, Kyle Spurr and James Cooley.

"Defense at the AUS level is played by all six players," said Taylor. "The expectation is that as a team we will continue to refine and commit to being a defense-first, puck possession team that is relentless in our work ethic and commitment to team goals."

Goaltending will continue to be a strength for the green and white. Paul Drew, one of the top goal-tenders in the AUS, returns for his fourth season. Backup Dayne Davis showed last year he is more than capable of filling in, playing 11 games while Drew competed at the World University Games and recuperated from a knee injury late in the year.

Special teams was another concern for UPEI in 2006-07 - partic-

ularly the power play, which ranked last in the AUS with a 12.7 percent success rate.

The squad fared better on the penalty kill, finishing fourth at 83.1 percent.

Taylor believes the quartet of newcomers will help to shore up those areas.

"With our focus on bringing in offensive potential to our team, we believe we have the ability to be, with the proper attention to detail, an exceptional special teams team on the power play and penalty kill," he said.

The Panthers have yet to make the playoffs under Taylor, but with last year's plethora of newcomers now having a year of AUS play under their belts, he expects that to change this season.

"Our objective is to be in the playoffs and the very best we can be by focusing on our effort and attitude and controlling the things we can control. We believe and expect as players, and the coaching staff, that we will be a playoff team with the potential at that time to make a run at our ultimate goal if all hearts and minds are pulling in the same direction."

2007-08 season ticket sales will resume from Sept. 24-27 at MacLauchlan Arena from 4:00-5:30.

Panthers add centre in time for preseason

By Josh Lewis

The UPEI Panthers have made a last minute addition to their forward group, with centre Howie Martin joining the team after five seasons in the Ontario Hockey League.

Martin, 20, played for the

Sudbury Wolves and Brampton Battalion before being dealt to the Owen Sound Attack in January. The 10-player blockbuster also saw Toronto Maple Leafs prospect Phil Oreskovic sent to the Attack.

The Hillsburgh, Ont. native said the chance to join former Brampton teammate Tomas Stryncl in Prince Edward Island was too

tempting to pass up.

"I came out here for a visit three weeks ago. I thought it was really nice out here. I have a good relationship with the coach (Dylan Taylor). A friend of mine, Tomas Stryncl, is here and I played with him in the OHL for a few years."

Stryncl, a defenseman from the Czech Republic, joined UPEI during the summer.

"Howie's an offensive-minded centre who plays very well positionally," said Taylor. "He's a thinker and a passer type of player. He has tremendous vision and distributes the puck very, very well."

Martin registered 70 and 60 points in his final two seasons in the OHL, respectively, including 46 assists in 2005-06 with Brampton.

Taylor has high hopes for his new centre down the road.

"He has the potential to develop within our program, with the proper effort, into a top line centreman."

Martin is optimistic he'll be able to make an immediate impact in the Atlantic University sport conference.



Howie Martin

"Hopefully I can (contribute right away). I'm a playmaker so hopefully I can help the goal-scorers on the team score a few more goals, and hopefully I can score a few myself.

"The guys here are a lot stronger and a lot faster (than in junior). It should be good hockey for me."

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