

League confirms collapse of Orangeville Ice Crushers



Following four years of junior hockey in Orangeville, the Ice Crushers of the Greater Metro Hockey League has folded with immediate effect GMHL General Manager and Commissioner Ken Girard confirmed on Tuesday (Jan. 24).

Mr. Girard said the league was made aware of a potential situation last week after Ice Crushers staff and players were locked out of their Alder Street Arena locker room, with municipal staff apparently concerned about the organization's ability to pay its arena fees moving forward.

?'We received a phone call last week that indicated the team would not be in a position to fulfill its commitments for the remainder of the 2016/2017 GMHL season,' Mr. Girard said. 'To my understanding, the people in charge of running the arena demanded some money and the team didn't have it, so they were locked out.'

The Town of Orangeville's Director of Parks and Recreation Ray Osmond didn't give much away when he was contacted by the Citizen, simply stating the Orangeville Ice Crushers 'didn't meet the requirements' of a contract the team had with the municipality. He said he would be providing a full report to council on Monday, which should shed some more light into the situation.

This is just the latest in a long line of high profile controversies to hit the organization in recent months. Back in the summer it was revealed that the Ice Crushers' sister side the Shelburne Sharks wouldn't be returning for the 2016/2017 GMHL season after the Town of Shelburne revealed the organization owed the municipality over \$15,000 in unpaid arena fees.

Then there was the whirlwind drug bust back on Nov. 15 that saw three members of the Ice Crushers' executive arrested. Head Coach and General Manager CJ Schneider, goaltending coach Ryan Zeng and the team's public relations director and head planner Rada Culciar were all charged with multiple marijuana production and trafficking offences.

Ice Crushers shareholder Jeff Oliver, who last served as assistant coach with the team back in 2014 when the organization was known as the Orangeville Americans, took over the day-to-day coaching operations of the team immediately following Schneider's arrest and looked to galvanize a squad that sat at the bottom of the GMHL standings with a 4-17-0 record.

Speaking to the Citizen on Wednesday (Jan. 25), Mr. Oliver said he was completely blindsided by the decision to fold the team, stating he was under the impression the organization's arena fees were paid up for the remainder of the year.

'When I came in my focus right away was on the guys and making sure they were still able to play the game they love. I thought everything on the financial side of things was taken care of, but it turns out there's no money left,' Mr. Oliver said. 'The first I heard about it was the day we were locked out of the arena (Jan. 16). I was told we didn't have the money to pay for the facilities moving forward and that we could collect our personal items, but that was it.'

Over the proceeding few days, Mr. Oliver spent much of his time on the phone with fellow coaches and GMs from around the league, trying to find a new home for the majority of the 28-man Orangeville team. He told the Citizen he was successful in finding all those that wanted to continue playing new teams, while he himself took on a role with the Meaford Knights.

The last game the team played resulted in a 12-0 loss to the Parry Sound Islanders. Since the lockout, the Ice Crushers have forfeited games to the Bradford Rattlers and New Tecumseth Civics. There are seven games remaining in the team's 2016/2017 schedule.

'I didn't think it would come down to this, that's for sure,' Mr. Oliver said. 'I knew things were a little messed up after everything that happened back in November, but I thought my job coming in was to stabilize the team and make sure the boys had someone they could count on. Turns out I was kept in the dark on a lot of things and everything sort of went south once people realized there was no money left.'

He concluded, 'It's pretty terrible how everything has played out.'

Mr. Girard noted there was indication that the team would be returning in the future.