

Puck drops on MJHL’s Turnbull Cup final Friday

Kings, Blizzard set to go the distance

BEN LITTLE

IT’S not a stretch to say the Dauphin Kings and Northern Manitoba Blizzard are evenly matched.

Last year, both teams met in the first round of the MJHL playoffs. The series went seven games, featuring 11 overtime periods — including a five-over-time period battle in game six.

Northern Manitoba eventually won the series with an overall goal differential of plus-two.

This year they meet again, with the Turnbull Cup championship on the line.

“We’re expecting to be dug in for a long series,” said Doug Hedley, Dauphin’s head coach and general manager. “Stars have to line up and things have to go well.”

The MGEU East Division foes split the six-game regular season series, separated by one goal favouring Dauphin.

Hedley said fundamentals and attitude are pivotal in matchups like this.

“It’s going to come down to little things,” said Hedley. “Rebounding from mistakes and how you push back at certain times of the game.”

Both teams are relatively young. The Kings have only four 20-year-old skaters, while the Blizzard have 15 skaters born after 2005.

“We consider ourselves to be a younger group that has some very good 18 and 19-year-olds,” said Hedley.

Eric Labrosse, Northern Manitoba’s head coach and general manager, said



Gabriel Bugeaud (right) has three goals and six assists for the Dauphin Kings during this season’s MJHL playoffs.

the Blizzard’s two previous playoff opponents, Neepawa and Winkler, were both more veteran teams.

That didn’t trouble the Blizzard, who beat Neepawa in five before sweeping the defending champion Flyers.

Labrosse said he’s not concerned about his younger players stepping up when stakes are high.

“It was always important to include

all my younger guys in getting playing time,” said Labrosse. “When this time of the season comes around, you want them to be comfortable in every situation.”

Among those younger players is 18-year-old goaltender Taye Timmerman, whose 1.79 goals-against average leads all goaltenders this post-season.

“When I spoke about character ...

Turnbull Cup Schedule

- Game 1**
April 18, 7:30 p.m., Northern Manitoba at Dauphin, Credit Union Place
- Game 2**
April 20, 7 p.m., Dauphin at Northern Manitoba, Roy H. Johnston Arena
- Game 3**
April 22, 7:30 p.m., Northern Manitoba at Dauphin, Credit Union Place

- Game 4**
April 25, 7 p.m., Dauphin at Northern Manitoba, Roy H. Johnston Arena
- Game 5** (if necessary)
April 27, 7:30 p.m., Northern Manitoba at Dauphin, Credit Union Place
- Game 6** (if necessary)
April 29, 7 p.m., Dauphin at Northern Manitoba, Roy H. Johnston Arena
- Game 7** (if necessary)
May 1, 7:30 p.m., Northern Manitoba at Dauphin, Credit Union Place

(Timmerman) is exactly that,” said Labrosse.

Last season, Timmerman was cut from the Bruins U18 AAA team. He joined the Winnipeg Thrashers and later beat that same Bruins team in the playoffs, winning Goaltender of the Year.

When 19-year-old Blizzard goaltender Alex Reedy got injured at the beginning of this season, Timmerman had to step up. He continued to exceed coach Labrosse’s expectations throughout the year — earning him the starting job.

“That’s exactly what Taye brought to this team this year — a lot of character, a lot of determination,” said Labrosse.

Timmerman said the adversity helps him thrive in his new role.

“It really all led up to this moment,” said Timmerman. “It would mean

everything to win it.”

Through 19 meetings in the past two seasons, both teams share an admiration and respect for each other.

Labrosse said he isn’t preparing against individual players, but a well-balanced Dauphin team.

“You can’t be caught sleeping defensively on these guys,” said Labrosse. “They can make you pay real quick in the D-zone with their offence ... we’ll have to be alert.”

It’s hard to imagine this series going as long as last year’s first-round matchup. Still, neither side is taking their opponent for granted.

“I expect it to be just as hard this year,” said Labrosse. “It’s going to be a tough matchup, and we’re ready to take it on.”

Game 1 of the Turnbull Cup finals is set for Friday at Credit Union Place in Dauphin.

Guerrero hits first homer of season as Jays top Braves

IAN HARRISON

TORONTO — Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his first home run of the season and drove in a pair, Chris Bassitt pitched five shutout innings and the Toronto Blue Jays spoiled Spencer Strider’s return from elbow surgery by beating the Atlanta Braves 3-1 on Wednesday.

Chris Bassitt (2-0) struck out a season-high 10 and allowed three hits, all singles. The right-hander lowered his ERA to 0.77 through four starts.

The Blue Jays set a single-game, nine-inning record with 19 strikeouts.

Jeff Hoffman gave up Drake Baldwin’s first career home run in the ninth inning, but finished for his fourth save in four opportunities.

Strider (0-1) allowed two runs and five hits in five innings. Making his first big league appearance in 376 days because of surgery to repair the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow, the right-hander struck out five, walked one, and hit a batter. He threw 97 pitches, 58 for strikes.

Bo Bichette had two doubles, scored a run and drove in a run as Toronto took two of three from Atlanta.

Bichette doubled to begin the third inning and Guerrero followed with an RBI single to drive in the game’s first run.

Bassitt finished his outing by striking out Braves slugger Austin Riley to strand runners at second and third.

After homering three times in the first two games of the series, Riley went 0 for 4 with four strikeouts in the finale.

The Braves are 2-11 on the road.

Guerrero began the sixth with a 412-foot homer into the second deck on a 3-2 slider from Strider.

Strider’s hardest pitch of the game was a 98 mph fastball to Guerrero in the first.

Blue Jays RHP Bowden Francis (1-2, 3.71 ERA) is scheduled to start Friday when Toronto hosts Seattle. The Mariners had not announced a starter.

Blue Jays starter Max Scherzer, who’s on the injured list due to right thumb inflammation, was scheduled to visit a hand specialist Wednesday in Florida.

“It’s like a day-to-day thing,” Toronto manager John Schneider said Wednesday. “And I think getting clarity from a doctor he’s familiar with will hopefully keep that going in the same direction.”

“But he was more encouraged with how it felt yesterday than he was when he was in Baltimore.”

Once Scherzer is cleared to resume a regular routine, Schneider estimated he’d need at least a couple weeks to build back up for a return.

Left-hander Easton Lucas has filled in while Scherzer has been out. He has posted a 2-1 record and 4.70 earned-run average over three starts.

Scherzer, a three-time Cy Young Award winner, signed a one-year deal worth US\$15.5 million with the Blue Jays in February. He was 2-4 with a 3.95 ERA in nine starts for the Texas Rangers last season.



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DECADES OF SERVICE HONOURED

Henry McKay (middle), athletic director at Pimicikamak Cree Nation since 1993, receives his Hall of Fame award in the builder category from the Manitoba Aboriginal Sports & Recreation Council board of directors co-chairs Jayme Leary Balfour (left) and Daphne Titterton on Wednesday at the Manitoba Indigenous Sports and Hall of Fame & Major Awards Ceremony.

CHAMPIONS ● FROM D1

Wolfenden and Swanton were named co-Volunteer of the Year for their work in the 2024 Manitoba Summer Games in Dauphin. The Games’ co-chairs led a team of over 750 volunteers, who helped organize a successful event for 1,600 participants across 12 sports.

Hebert’s impact came as the head coach of the Rhythmic Royals Gymnastics Club, where she guided the program to top international finishes at meets in Denmark and Belgium. The Winnipegger has been at the forefront of advancing the sport locally through workshops and the Sport Manitoba Coaching Female Mentorship Program.

Meanwhile, it was a monumental year of growth for Team McDonald. Skip Jordon McDonald, third Dallas Burgess, second Elias Huminicki and lead Cam Olafson went from the junior ranks, where they won the U20 Provincial Championship and Canadian Junior Cup, to emerging as one of the top men’s teams in the country.

The Assiniboine-based team’s goals were to qualify for the Canadian Olympic pre-trials, earn a top-32 ranking in the world in order to qualify for Grand Slam of Curling Tier 2 events and have a good showing at the Manitoba men’s championship.

“Those were our main goals, for sure, and we absolutely demolished them,” said McDonald.

The Manitobans won the Canadian U25 NextGen



JOHN WOODS / FREE PRESS FILES

From left: skip Jordon McDonald, third Dallas Burgess, second Elias Huminicki, lead Cam Olafson, coach William Lyburn.

Classic and Manitoba Curling Tour Curling Cup, and recorded seven top-three finishes to ascend to No. 7 in the country and No. 19 in the world this winter.

Team McDonald made their GSOC debut at the WFG Masters in January and later reached the play-

offs in the Manitoba men’s curling championship. They also narrowly missed out on direct qualification for the Olympic trials, but will play in the pre-trials in Wolfville, N.S., in October.

“It was really cool trying to chase that this year,” McDonald said of the Olympic trials berth. “We’re hoping to take that experience and learn from it because chasing points is a really important part of this game, especially when you’re an up-and-coming team and trying to move up the ranks.”

The team of 20-somethings even shocked themselves this season. They’ve set the bar high heading into the fall.

“I think the big takeaway for me is ... going into men’s, it just kind of puts perspective on it. Juniors was great and it’s a lot of fun, but playing men’s at a high level, juniors is really nothing compared to that,” McDonald said.

“When we were playing men’s this year, it just feels like every event we go into, there’s a lot at stake with points and cash and everything. And as a player, that is super fun and that brings out the best in us as our team and me as a player. ... so I think that that change has been a little bit helpful, and that in that success that we’ve had this year, it’s just made it a lot of fun for us.”

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