

U15 Nobleking Knights go from worst in 2024 to first in 2025 to win the Simcoe Region Local League Title



By Jim Stewart

The U15 Nobleking Knights captured the Simcoe Region Local League Championship with a 7-0 shellacking of the Lefroy Ice Breakers at the Nobleton Community Centre last Sunday. Winning the championship with seven consecutive playoff wins completed a remarkable metamorphosis by the hockey club. The Knights rose from "Dead last in 2024" as described by Team Manager Sarah Steen to finishing first after the regular season with a sparkling 22-1-3 record. The 16-team regional loop in which the Knights competed included the second-place Ice Breakers (19-3-4), third-place Oak Ridges Kings 1 (20-6-0), fourth-place Bradford Bulldogs 1 (19-5-2), and fifth-place Beeton Stingers 2 (14-8-4). Other teams in the league included the East Gwillimbury Eagles, Innisfil Winterhawks, Georgina Blaze, Schomberg Red Wings, TNT Tornados, and the Thornton Tigers. Nobleking Head Coach Orin Del Vecchio traced his team's roots all the way back to the darkest days of the Pandemic: "Fortunately, the best part of our success this season is that 1/3 of the team has been playing together since COVID. Finally having success after being a lower tier team for a couple of seasons and fulfilling their potential as hockey players was great to see. The payoff was really satisfying." Coach Del Vecchio, who has served as a volunteer coach for ten seasons, observed that the most important factor to the Knights' playoff success was the self-control of his players: "One of the critical things that our guys showed was more discipline on the ice. We were the third-most penalized team in the league during the regular season, but when the semifinals came against the second-most penalized team and the finals came against the most penalized team, we didn't react to the dirty play or rough stuff. To see that kind of focus showed the maturity that developed in our players." The Knights' veteran bench boss pointed to some individual achievements over the course of the regular season: "We had a couple of the guys get hat tricks during the season. Our goalie led the league in shutouts." However, Coach Del Vecchio preferred to emphasize how his team bought into defensive systems to ensure success: "We were a strong defensive team and supported our goalie who was only in his second season of playing at this level. We had the fewest goals allowed in the league. Our defensive play would provide turning points in games for us. If we got up by two goals, we'd always get a clutch defensive play or a big save then the offence would take over and score goals to put the game away." The turning point of the season came early for the Knights. Coach Del Vecchio explained: "In our fifth game, we played one of the strongest teams in the league. When we played the Oak Ridges Kings in Richmond Hill—a traditionally-strong team which was undefeated—and beat them 6-2 at Elvis Stojko Arena, I knew we had a chance to have a good season." Another significant element that generated success for the Knights was the variety of voices on the staff comprised of Assistant Coach Angela Franco and fiery Trainers Ralph Garcea and Joe Rotiroti. According to Coach Del Vecchio, "Our staff was very important to

our success. You can never do anything alone. All our different voices, angles, and attitudes gave the kids lots to respond to. Our trainers were often the fire and brimstone on the bench. As a result, I was able to be a moderate voice most of the time. Coach Del Vecchio also thanked his Team Manager Sarah Steed and the parent group as a key component in the Knights' championship season: Sarah did a great job with all the behind-the-scenes work. She did so much hard work that often goes unnoticed and under-appreciated to get sponsors for the team and get us recognition for the things we accomplished during the season. Full credit to our parents, as well. We had the backing of the parents. With the players, coaching staff, and parents riding in formation, Coach Del Vecchio's Knights swept through the best-of-three quarterfinal with 2-0 and 3-2 wins over Bradford Bulldogs Team 2. The Knights swept their best-of-five semifinal versus Bradford Bulldogs Team 1 with a range of victories: 6-1, 2-1, and 9-5. In the best-of-five championship final series, Nobleking edged Lefroy 4-3 in Game 1 and thumped the Ice Breakers 9-2 in Game 2. The Knights punctuated their seven-game playoff heater with an emphatic 7-0 Game 3 victory. Second-year goaltender Philip Chiodo stopped every puck fired his way by the Ice Breakers to cap off a Cinderella season for the hockey club. Chiodo recorded two shutouts and a 2.00 GAA during his club's torrid romp through the SRLL playoffs. Steed expressed her satisfaction when the components of her hockey club worked together toward a common goal: We had incredible community sponsors for a local league team to obtain, and the trainers, coaches, and parents have been so classy and supportive. We're just so delighted these boys persevered and truly won together given how well balanced the stats were between them. Garcea, whose son Ethan was a member of the championship squad, summed up the season in one word perseverance. To go from a 1-27 last-place season with a goal differential of -135, to winning it all kudos to the kids for sticking together and building a team bond that was unbeatable and fun to watch. Olga Nasrallah, whose son Sasha played for the Knights, concurred with Garcea about the team's inspirational determination: Defeat fuels victory. The team overcame adversity through the unbreakable bonds of teamwork.