

# Merchants mourn one of their own

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Sentinel-Review

NORWICH - The Norwich Merchants are a family in mourning.

Defenceman Ben Pearson, playing in his second season with the club, died early Saturday morning.

He was 20 years old.

Pearson had been battling an undisclosed medical condition for just nine days.

He last suited up for the Merchants on Sept. 24.

"He was sick. He had a cold and he didn't seem to recover from it and it just went from there," assistant coach Jarrett Rose said.

It was after the Sept. 24 game

that he was admitted to hospital in his hometown of Cambridge. He was later transferred to hospital in Guelph and then to University Hospital in London.

The Merchants were nearing the end of their 3-1 win against the Aylmer Spitfires when coaches received word that Pearson had been taken off life support.

Pearson's parents, Stephen and Robin Pearson, had asked the team to play the Friday night game in honour of their son. His number 7 jersey was hanging behind the team's bench.

"They wanted us to play that game for Benny. The kids gave everything they had for Benny,"

head coach Chad Paton said.

After the game, the players were informed of the news as a group.

"We had to break the news as a team and cry together," Paton said.

Pearson died around 12:30 a.m. Saturday.

"We have always said it is a Norwich Merchants family," team trainer Mark Baxter said.

Baxter said the team's players, staff, family and supporters have pulled together. He said he was reminded of the team's reaction after goaltender Kris Maloney suffered a life-threatening injury during a game in 2000.

The club's Saturday night game in Woodstock was can-

celled.

A tearful club president relayed a message from Ben Pearson's father Stephen Sunday afternoon, saying that his best year of hockey was played in Norwich, where he enjoyed the small town hockey atmosphere.

On the weekend, team staff said Pearson brought more than just his physical presence to the game.

"I think the biggest thing was what he brought into the room," said Rose, adding that after the loss of veteran players at the end of last season Ben Pearson stepped up to take on a leadership role on the team.

See **MOURNING** | Page 8



Photo courtesy of the Norwich Merchants

Norwich Merchants defenceman Ben Pearson died Saturday morning after a nine-day battle with an undisclosed illness.

# Pearson tribute to be held at Friday's game

## FROM PAGE 1

Pearson was born in Cambridge and lived in Kitchener.

Pearson had become one of the team's veteran defencemen and had just started his second season for the Merchants, coming from Cambridge Winterhawks Junior B team at the start of the 2009-2010 season.

Messages of condolence from family and friends were posted all weekend on Pearson's Facebook page.

"Your one of a kind bro, its gonna b tough not havin' you around any more," wrote teammate Addison Fisher "Its been a privilege to have known you for so long and you won't soon be forgotten. I can still remember lacin' em up with u in

peewee. Me and the rest of the Fish's are gonna miss ya. Luv ya Ben."

"Was an honour patrolling the blue lines with you. Love yah Benny! & forever missed bud," teammate Todd Kemp added.

"Love you forever benny, always my #7. RIP kid. Nothing can take away the memories though bro!" wrote teammate Stuart Preston, who played defence with Pearson.

"Benny... it was a true honour to wear the red and white with you!" added last season's team captain Steven Boyd "You touched a lot of people in a lot of different ways...

but the times we had together will never go forgotten, you are one of the best team mates I have ever put on a jers with and a even better friend... I know you will watch over the boys up there!!

Never forgotten 7,

Love you forever brother!!"

As of Sunday afternoon, funeral arrangements had not been confirmed.

The Norwich Merchants are planning a tribute to Pearson at Friday's home game against New Hamburg that will include raising his jersey and a bagpiper.

