

# sports

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STORIES OF 2010

## Drama makes hockey top sports story of 2010

CORY SMITH  
Sentinel-Review

WOODSTOCK — It was a dramatic year in hockey. There was corruption and accomplishment. Tragedy and recovery. Turmoil and recognition. Even a restriction.

Those components were enough to make hockey, whether it happened locally or by locals playing abroad, the top sports story of 2010.

It started early in the year, as Ontario Hockey Association linesman Kevin Brown fought for his life in a London hospital. Brown, a Sebringville native, was breaking up a fight during the Woodstock Renegades/New Hamburg Firebirds game last December. An errant skate sliced Brown's carotid artery, and he nearly died on the Firebirds bench at Southwood Arena. He spent the ensuing weeks in hospital and suffered a stroke because of the blood loss.

The 25-year-old received an outpouring of support from the hockey community, and in January the OHA mandated neck guards to prevent future incidents. Firebirds' trainer Greg Henning, Woodstock trainers Bert Cowell and Dan Dukes, and Woodstock parent Paula Thomson were later recognized for saving Brown's life.

Brown, meanwhile, continues to recover and is hopeful of returning to the ice.

In March, Woodstock's Kelly Paton was named as a finalist for the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, which goes to the top women's hockey player in the NCAA.

Paton, a Huron Park graduate, ended her four-year run at the University of New Hampshire by winning the Hockey East Co-Player of the Year, First Team All-Star and Three Stars Award.

Kelly Paton is an outstanding leader and captain who has quietly gone about being the most dominant player in Hockey East this year and, in my opinion, is the most valuable as well. Wildcats head coach Brian McCloskey told the UNH website.

In 139 career games, Paton compiled 62 goals and 100 assists for 162 points. She ranks fifth in assists, 11th in points and 10th in goals on UNH's all-time leaderboard.

Offensively, she's been one of the nation's top point producers," McCloskey said. "Defensively, she is the best forward I've ever coached at UNH."

March also saw the return of the Woodstock Navy Vets to Junior C. After more than 40 years as the Navy Vets, legal issues forced the team to change its name to the Renegades from



After two seasons as the Renegades, the Woodstock Navy Vets returned to the Niagara Junior C Hockey League in 2010.

ELLIOT FERGUSON Sentinel-Review File Photo

2007-08 to 2009-10.

"We had to be Renegades for a reason," former owner Bill McLeod said. "That's not a secret. But to get the Navy Vets back is something we always talked about."

The end of April also brought with it the end to a months-long saga between members of the Woodstock Minor Hockey Association executive and a group of dissident parents. It started in September with the attempted removal of Pat Langdon and came to a head during the April 30 annual general meeting.

When it was finished, only Alf Langdon, Mike Collins and Belinda Weiler remained on a board that, after much wrangling and debate surrounding previous requisitions to vote on each position, finally relented and threw open the vote.

"I came on this board to make positive change," former WMHA

president Joe Jakubowski said after declining to run for another term. "Some people don't like change. You're obviously the people who really care about the association and you bothered to show up."

October was marked by an historic achievement and a tragic loss.

Jacob Muzzin became the second Woodstock-born player to play in the NHL after he made the Los Angeles Kings. The 21-year-old former Pittsburgh Penguins draft pick signed with the Kings as a free agent earlier in the year and parlayed a solid training camp into a roster spot.

"I'm a little surprised (to make the team) but at the same time I worked hard and feel I deserve it," he told the Sentinel-Review. "I gotta continue improving and hopefully I have a long career in the NHL."

The big defenceman played 11

games with the Kings, collecting one assist while shutting back and forth between the parent club and the American Hockey League's Manchester Monarchs. Muzzin has found his offensive game in Manchester and is a candidate to be called up once again should injuries strike the Kings.

Tragedy struck in October as Norwich Merchants defenceman Ben Pearson died following a short illness.

Pearson had an undetected liver enzyme deficiency that couldn't break down protein. He lapsed into a coma before succumbing to the rare condition.

"From Day 1 it was clear what kind of person he was and that he would fit in well with the group of players we had in the room," former Merchants' teammate Chad Barclay said. "He had a laid back mindset but was a fierce competitor when he needed to be. He was very motivated and people listened to him, whether he was being serious or just telling a story. He was the kind of person that people just wanted to be around."

The year ended with the revelation that some Ontario Hockey Association teams were paying their players beyond the specified guidelines.

The Waterloo Siskins admitted to paying players \$55,000 last season, while a former Wingham Ironmen player said he was paid

bonus money for wins and personal achievements, which is also a violation of OHA rules.

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The Norwich Merchants were accused of offering a player \$10,000 a season for two years — a claim they strongly denied — while the Simcoe Storm were also implicated following a Facebook message from one of its players to another player.

"I don't know where it started or why it's so out of control now," Woodstock Navy Vets head coach Jeff Morrison said. "Costs are on the rise as it is. Why are we paying players to play hockey?"

**HONOURABLE MENTIONS:**

— The Woodstock Soccer Club's completion of the Cowan Park Project. Lights were

installed at the premier pitch and an indoor facility opened its doors, bringing finality to the ambitious \$5.1-million dollar facility.

"When I joined the executive 14 years ago it was still a dream," Kelly Stringle said on the second night of indoor games. "To see that dream get closer, and this week see the kids out there, it's amazing."

"I'm still in awe. Every time I walk out here I think, 'Wow, it actually happened.'"

— The Huron Park Huskies' cross-country team that won the junior girls' OFSAA championship. Led by coach Sheila Robinson, the team of Madalyn Ruby, Jessie MacLupine, Marissa Okos, Susannah Spirling and Michaela Lieve finished tied with St. Thomas Aquinas with 133 points, but was awarded gold based on Lieve's result. The championship was the first in school history.

"Every Huron Park girl came up with a huge roar," Robinson said. "These girls were fifth last year at their first OFSAA as midlevel girls in Grade 9, and really wanted to medal this year as Grade 10 juniors. We knew they could do it, but of course a lot has to go properly all season with training (and) keeping injuries at bay."

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CORY SMITH Sentinel-Review File Photo  
The recovery of linesman Kevin Brown from a devastating injury suffered last December while officiating in Woodstock was one of the top sports stories of the year. From left, OHA president Brent Ladis, parent and registered nurse Paula Thomson, Firebirds' trainer Greg Henning, Kevin Brown, Woodstock trainers Dan Dukes and Bert Cowell.

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Best Wishes.

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