

He's not keeping it under his hat

The place is the same. So is the man behind the bench.

The uniforms look the same and even the hat on the man behind the bench is the same. But, as the man behind the bench will tell you, things are different.

The man in the hat is Norm Dowdall, currently the coach of the Mississauga midget AA Reps, and formerly the coach of the former Dixie Ventures, formerly of the Central Ontario Junior B Hockey League.

This is Dowdall's first year back in hockey following a year's sabbatical enforced by new career duties. But a change in job responsibilities has brought Dowdall back to the game he loves and could eventually lead him back to junior hockey.

"Well, I wouldn't say I'm dying to get back to junior hockey," he says. "But I'm itching a bit. I may get around to it."

Translated from Dowdall's English, that means he's dying to get back to junior hockey and will definitely get back to it.

Junior hockey will be the better for his return, should it happen. Knowing Dowdall, it probably will.

Dowdall left junior hockey in a blaze of glory, leading the surprising Ventures to third place and into a crosstown semi-final against the dreaded Streetsville Derbys.

Chris Zelkovich
Times Sports Editor



Ventures lost that series 3-1 and three months later became hockey history when the club folded because of a lack of funds. They were also without a coach since Dowdall had resigned after the playoffs.

But Ventures made quite a mark for themselves in their two-year existence. After an expected dismal first season, Ventures were expected to have a dismal second season.

Dowdall didn't expect it and wouldn't let his players expect it, either. Despite having to listen to stories that Ventures were a farm team for the Derbys, they battled the Streetsville team all season and when the schedule ended had finished one point ahead of the highly-rated Derbys.

They did it with a bit of talent, with players such as Russ Foster, Rob May, Bill Shutt and Barry Carroll. But for the most part they did it with desire and discipline instilled in them by Dowdall.

They became so good that there were hints they could beat their parent club, and then moribund Dixie Beehives. Others hinted that the Beehives best player played for the Ventures, instead of the other way around.

Before Dowdall had whipped them into shape most believe the Ventures would have

trouble making the playoffs.

Dowdall is doing a similar job with the Reps this year. They're in second place, having lost only four games.

While a record like that is pleasing to a man like Dowdall, he's not above planning for bigger things.

"I'm enjoying this to a degree," he says.

As far as a return to junior hockey goes, Dowdall may have to look no further than his current home rink — Dixie Arena Gardens. Junior B Beehives, successors to the Ventures, are struggling and coach Scotty Watson is something less than happy with the effort he's gotten from his players. He has hinted that he won't be back.

So there's a possibility that next year the place could be the same, the uniforms the same and the man in the hat behind the bench the same.

But it could be a different bench.

Neerlandia planning on thinking young

Neerlandia Soccer Club is planning to think young in 1979.

The third division Toronto Soccer Association team is opening indoor training on Sunday, Jan. 7 at Applewood Heights Secondary School with the emphasis on youth. Training starts at 10 a.m. and runs to noon.

Last year's coach Ron Rimmer, who is hoping to find a new coach for next season, is planning to put most of the younger players on the third division team. Most of the older players would play in an over-30 league.

"We want to encourage the younger players," Rimmer says. "It can be discouraging to a young player who's got to beat out guys who've been on the team for five years."

Neerlandia will also be thinking Holland this year. The club will spend two weeks in Holland in

August, playing in an international tournament against teams from England, Spain, Belgium, Holland and France.

Anyone interested in trying out for the team can attend Sunday's training or call club president Bert Gardner at 656-5829

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