

On the ball



DAN HO / SPECIAL TO THE OAKVILLE BEAVER

MITE-Y SWING: Abbey Coulter takes a swing at the ball during an Oakville Angels mite house league girls' softball contest Wednesday at River Oaks Park.

Flag football players hope to learn on the fly

By Herb Garbutt
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Six Oakville football players will have their ability to adapt and execute on the fly put to the test this weekend.

Mitchell Garvey, Ryan Thompson, Daniel Higgins, Matt Gima, Evan Thompson and Conor O'Brien are members of Burlington Stampeders squads — under-16 and under-18 — that will represent Ontario at the national flag football championships this weekend in Halifax. But despite having more than five decades of experience amongst the play-

ers, the game they will be playing will be very new to them.

Burlington's flag football league uses seven players and regulation field. At nationals, however, teams will be playing five-a-side on a 25-yard-wide field.

"Timing is so important in this game," said Dave Thompson, the under-18 coach, "so playing on a field half the size we're used to, the timing is going to be very difficult to adjust to."

Other provinces play the five-a-side game in their leagues so the Stampeders players will be put to the test. Each team can only carry seven players so making

in-game adjustments will be difficult.

"It's a bit of a coaching challenge because if the other team is doing something offensively, it's not like we have the defence on the the sideline with us," said Dave Thompson, the under-18 coach. "We'll have to wait to the half or use a time out."

The teams have been practicing against one another in preparation for the nationals but they know each province will play a unique style.

Barry Hutton, who will coach the under-16 team, said in many cases it will

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Former Navy vet was one of youngest to win Grey Cup title

By Danny Gallagher
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Playing for an obscure team in a setting where only a few thousand people showed up to watch, Mickey McFall still relished the glory.

After all, the tough two-way tackle was a member of the Grey Cup champion St. Hyacinthe-Donnacona Navy Combines from Quebec that won the 1944 national title. And he was only 18 years old, making him one of the youngest players — if not the youngest — to ever win a Grey Cup title, emblematic of national football supremacy.

McFall, a long-time Oakville resident, passed away earlier this year at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital, succumbing to complications from heart-valve surgery. He was 85 years old.

So obscure was his Navy Combines squad that a quarter of a century passed by before league officials and Grey Cup brass decided that the Combines should get recognition for their feat during the war years when regular teams weren't used. McFall and the Combines beat the Hamilton Flying Wildcats 7-6 before a sparse crowd of 3,871 at Hamilton's Civic Stadium, marking the last year that a service club won the Grey Cup.

The Combines started out as a pick-up crew, a bunch of sailors who liked to mess around on the football field. Playing coach Glen Brown moulded four seniors (himself included), a number of intermediates and a group of high schoolers such as McFall into a reputable defensive unit with many players travelling 40 miles to attend team practices.

The team was a combination of two HMCS units: St. Hyacinthe, located 40 miles from Montreal and Donnacona based in downtown Montreal. Before playing in the Grey Cup game, the Combines got ready by playing games against other Quebec teams, including McGill.

In the Grey Cup game, the six-foot-tall McFall helped spearhead a group that all but grounded the

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