

# Challenging year ahead for Jr. Red Sox

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

Too few practices and too many question marks. That's what the Junior Red Sox face heading into season-opening play at Brian Best Park Sunday afternoon.

On the eve of what's essentially a rebuilding year — with half of the 2003 roster now over-age — Glenn Turner's charges have had minimal prep time due to this spring's seemingly endless amount of downpours.

Not that neighbouring communities haven't had similar soak-fests, but with drainage extra slow on local diamonds — sometimes leaving fields unusable for up to two days after being drenched — the Red Sox dread the wet stuff a little more than their COBA counterparts.

"Yeah, we really haven't had that many practices. It's been pretty horrible out there," said the veteran manager, who lost some key pitching and a bit of everything else in this year's mass exodus.

A lack of spring training is particularly concerning this season, with Milton sporting a number of rookies who now must make the often difficult

transition to the wood bat. Stressed Turner, "For a lot of guys it takes quite a while to adjust. It's certainly going to be a factor."

Just how the newcomers adapt is perhaps the biggest unknown these days, although it's gamely rivaled with speculation on how the once Tier 2 Red Sox will fare now that COBA's junior ranks have been lumped back into one division.

And with just 18 players on board for 2004, depth at certain positions is no doubt another area in question.

But then Turner knows things could be a whole lot worse.

In fact up until a few weeks ago he had only a dozen players committed for the season, and hopes for filling out the ranks looked rather bleak.

Coming through in the clutch — so to speak — returnee Evan Jeans enlisted the services of baseball buddies Rob Bennett, Bryan McComb, Ryan McManus and Reg Taylor.

Turner is hoping Bennett and Taylor can rediscover some of the magic they brought to Bishop Reding's Halton and GHAC championship wins last spring.

"Most definitely that type of track record should help," noted the Red Sox' skipper. "Winning is a habit — at any level."

Perhaps the biggest bright spot right now is pitching depth. Along with veteran hurlers like Michael Volpe, Conan O'Brien, Ryan Harper and Kevin Cooper, Milton welcomes promising youngsters Steve Spiers and Peter Nicolaichuk.

McComb and Taylor are others who can log some innings, so the Red Sox should have enough available arms and sufficient variety to throw at opponents — with proven southpaws Cooper and O'Brien complementing hard-hurling Harper and Volpe, among others.

"I think we should be alright for pitching, although I'll probably have to work a little with some of the new guys," said Turner, who's running the team alongside assistant coach Frank Hume. "The big thing will be to try and get everyone on the same page fast. It's going to be a challenging year."

Sunday's home opener against Erindale starts at 1 p.m. Monday night the Red Sox make their first road trip, heading east to take on Brampton.

## Kids football camp in June

Gridiron hopefuls will get a chance to strut their stuff next month at the Milton Marauders' inaugural youth football camp.

Set for June 12 and 13 at Milton District High School, the camp is open to boys and girls age eight to 18 and will be run by Marauders players and Argonaut alumni.

Day two of the camp will feature a punt, pass and kick competition in each age division, with winners in each category receiving plaques at half-time during the team's Canada Day Classic July 3 against Mississauga.

The cost of the weekend event is \$30 per player. To sign up or for more information, call Carolyn Silwinski at (905) 525-2378.

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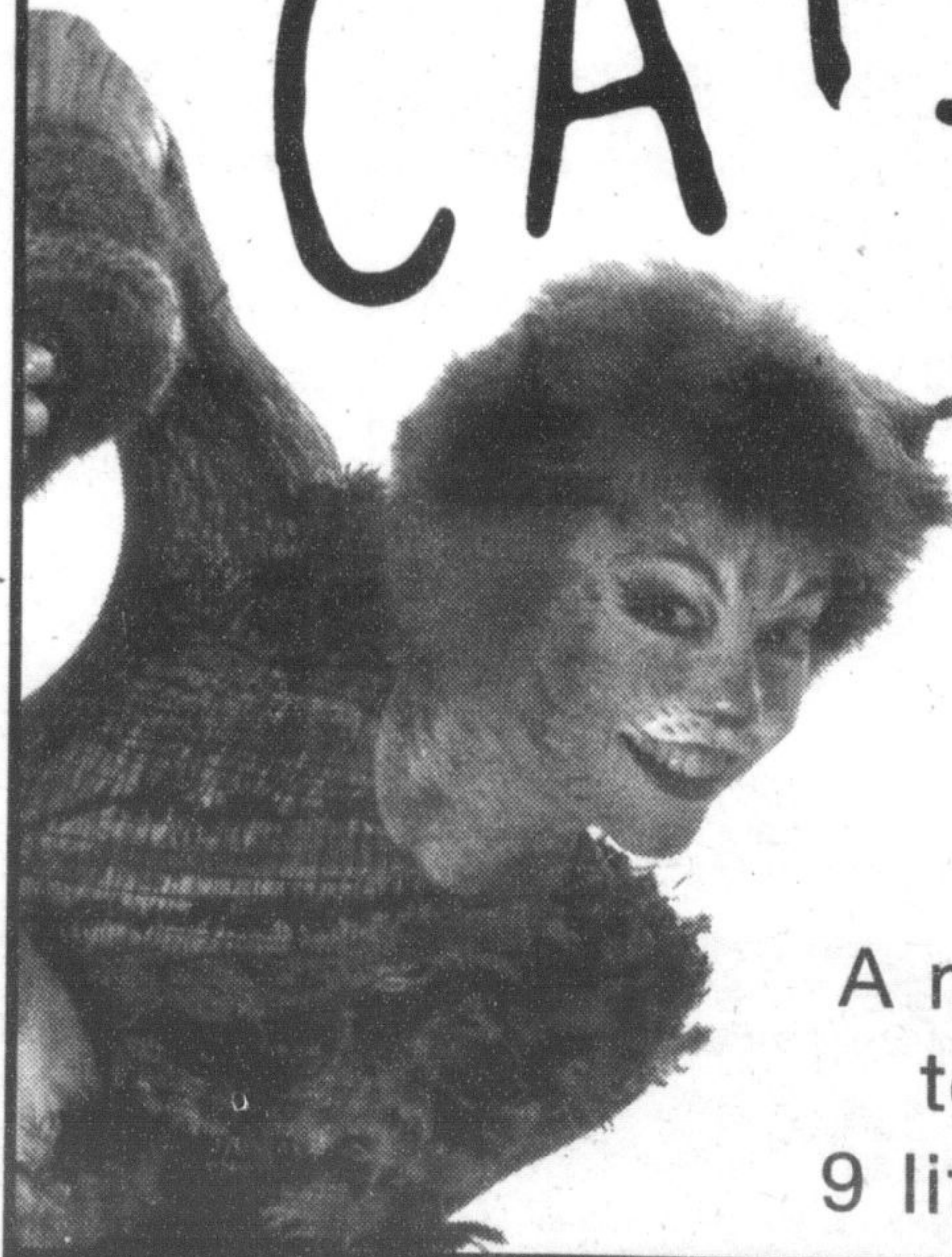
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