

Soccer dreams mask painful memory of war

By CHRIS SHANAHAN
STOUFFVILLE — The booming finale of Whitchurch-Stouffville's Canada Day fireworks display brought back some unpleasant memories for at least one spectator.

Roland Kassermelli fought back tears as the hauntingly familiar sound made him think of mortar fire common in his war-stricken homeland of Beirut, Lebanon.

"Tears started coming down my eyes," recalls the 15-year-old, who's struggling to put his homeland's internal strife behind as he builds a new life in a new country.

Roland enjoys living at his father's Loretta Crescent home, but lives in constant fear for the safety of his mother Marie, who remains close to the line of fire in Beirut.

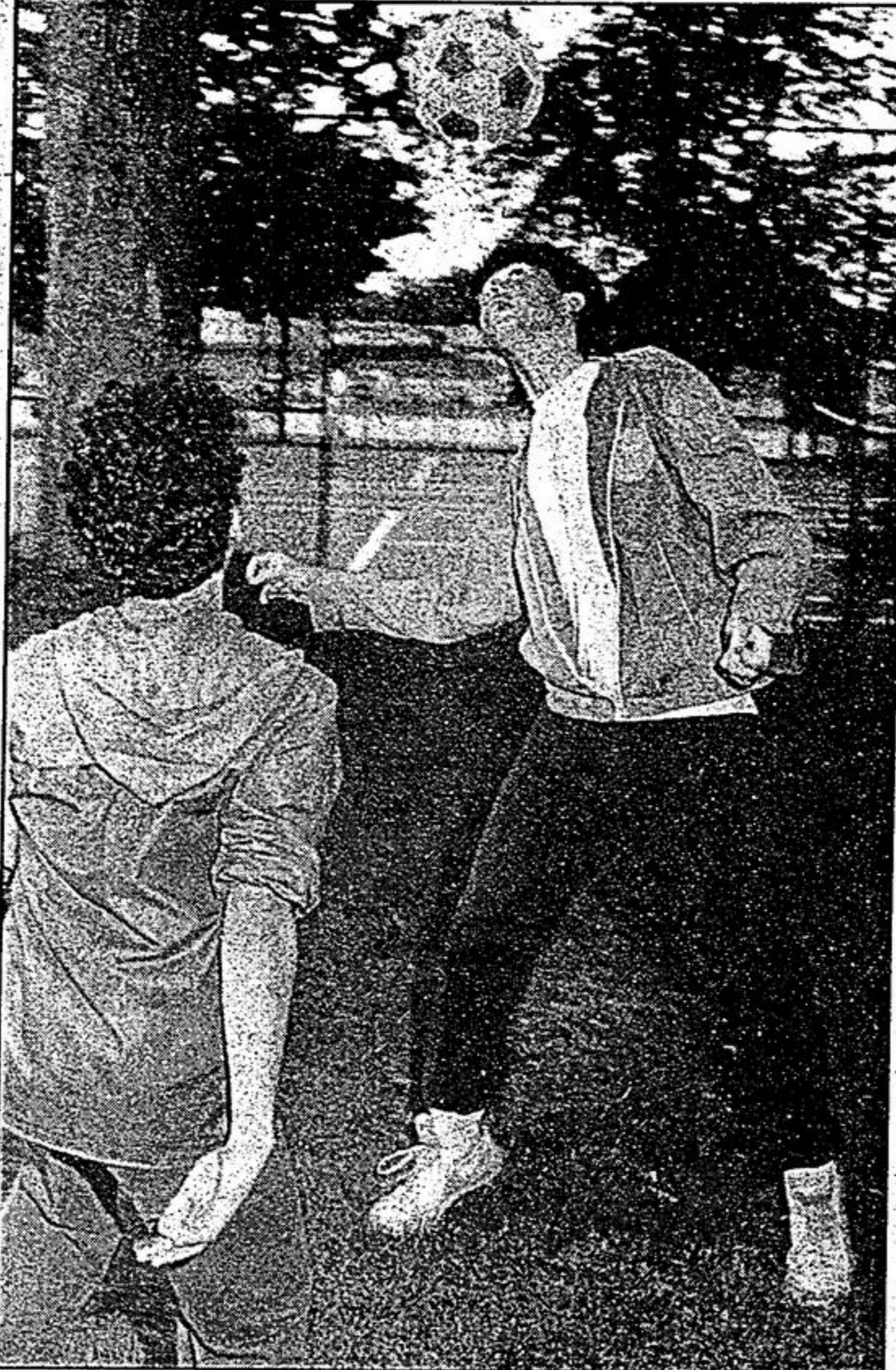
A recent letter confirmed that fighting is still raging on, bringing back horrible memories like the time the Kassermellis witnessed a brutal shooting outside their home.

Today, the budding soccer star practices his favorite sport at least two hours a day in search of his dream of one day playing for his adopted country at the national level.

Maybe as early as 1990, he said, "I'll see if I can go for Canada's national team" and possibly earn a trip to the next World Cup.

First, the former Stouffville Royal hopes to follow in the footsteps of fellow Stouffville player Vince Nardi and join Toronto's

National Soccer League. According to Roland, who's looking forward to taking out his Canadian citizenship: "Soccer here is not as popular as in Lebanon, but it's now a little more popular because Canada went to the World Cup."



Dreams of World Cup competition

Roland Kassermelli, 15, (foreground) has been honing his soccer skills since arriving in Stouffville from his native Lebanon over a year ago. Here, he practices some nifty headwork with friend and fellow soccer enthusiast Gerry Visco, 17.



ROLAND KASSERMELLI

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