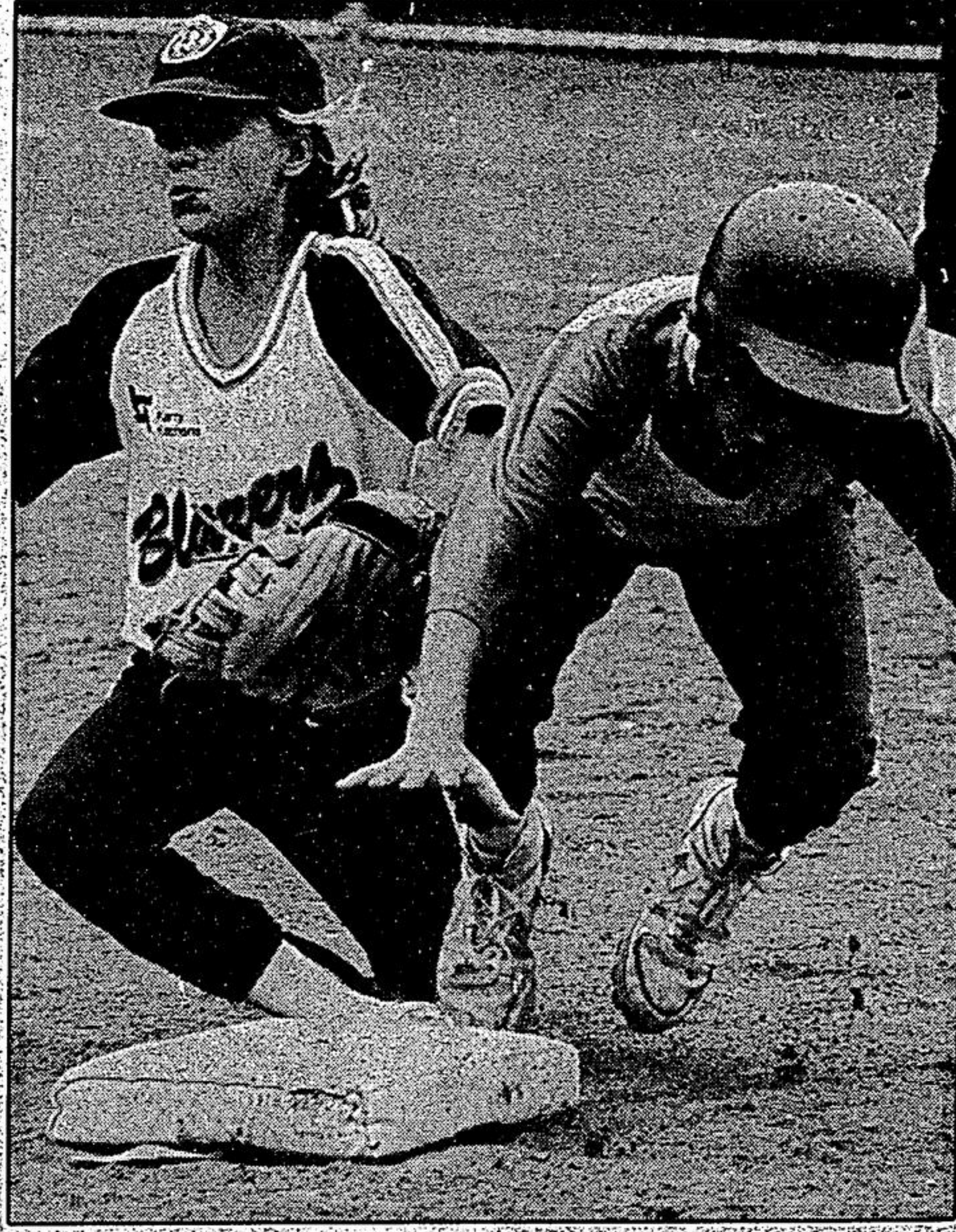
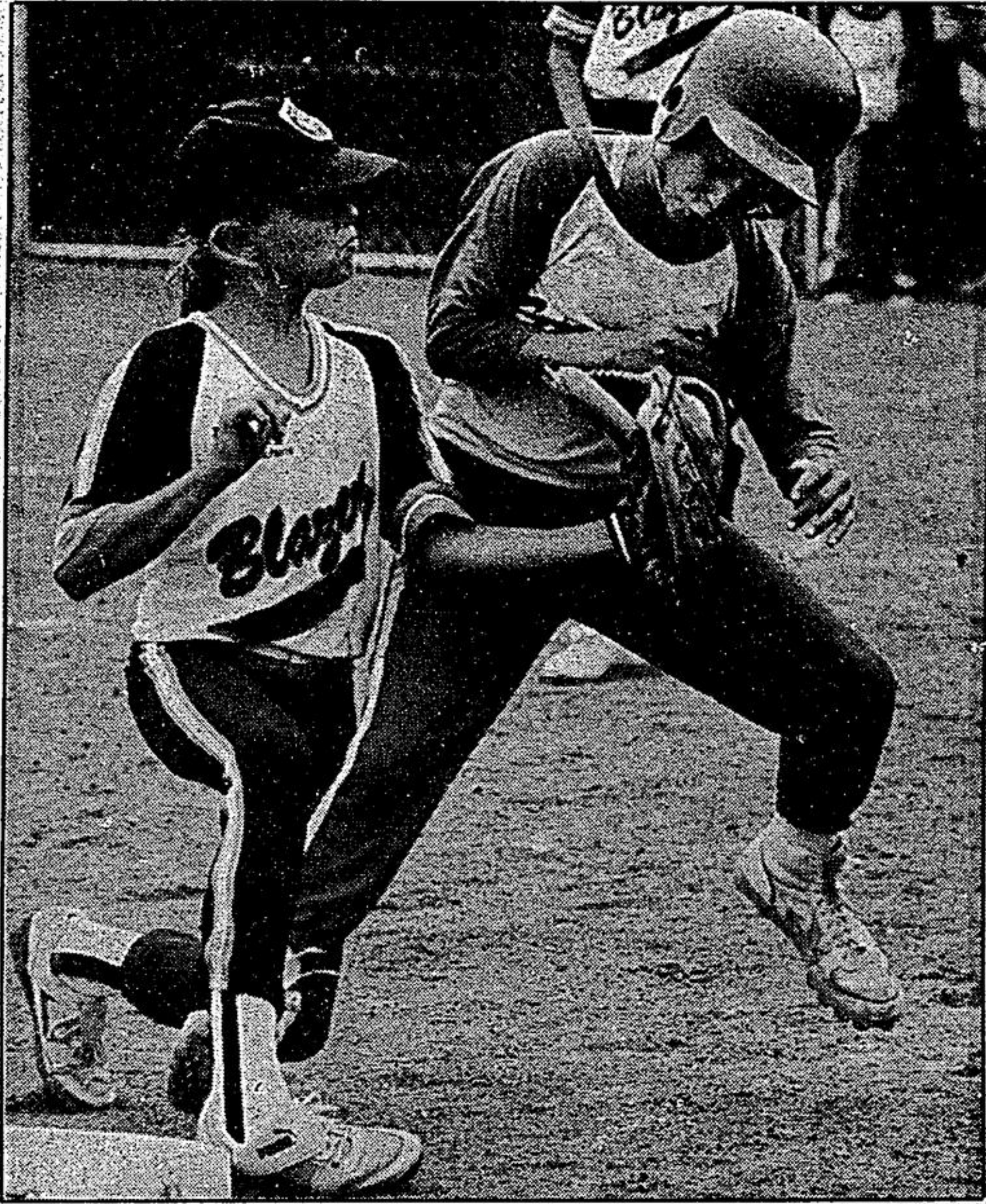


SPORTS

Stouffville Squirt girls fifth at Ontario's



Photos:ANNETTE BUCHKOWSKI

Crunching action at the hot corner

There was plenty of excitement at third base, the hot corner, during the Ontario Squirt Girls Softball Championships over the weekend at Stouffville Memorial Park. Above left, Stouffville's Patricia Davies tries to sneak her foot in past the tag of the Bram-

pton Blazers third bagger, who has the base nicely blocked with her foot. At right, both players suffer the consequence of the collision. The Stouffville girls finished fifth overall in the Ontario championships while the provincial title was won by St. Catharines.

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Correspondent

The Stouffville Action Sign Squirt Girls battled the weather, the odds, and some stiff competition in placing fifth overall in the Ontario Squirt Girls Softball Championships at Memorial Park on the weekend.

And when it was all over, the unrated Stouffville crew had split their four games, while their pitcher, Morgan Dubkowski, struck out a total of 37 batters and was voted third best pitcher in the tourney.

The competition, which was delayed Saturday due to rain, ended in brilliant sunshine Sunday afternoon, with St. Catharines claiming the gold, London the silver, and Unionville the bronze.

Stouffville got behind the eight ball right off the bat when they dropped a tough 6-4 decision to Pickering despite triples by Heather Lee and Tara Marshman.

But Stouffville bounced back to take a pair of 13-10 verdicts from Brampton and Chinguacousy.

Behind 10-6 to Brampton, the girls roared back to claim the win on back-to-back home runs by Julia Peters and Heather Lee. Katie White and Patricia Davies each whacked three hits for Action, with Melissa Miller turning an unassisted double play in the field for Stouffville.

Strong defence by Tara Marshman, Peters, and Davies led Stouffville over Chinguacousy. Crystal Annis keyed the offence with three hits, scoring two runs. Miller and Davies had two hit games, while Tammy Willis and Tricia Stevens also contributed with their bats.

But the Stouffville girls were stonewalled 11-1 by Cawthra in the cold, wet conditions Sunday morning. Miller, with a pair of hits, was the only Action girl to touch the Cawthra pitcher. Ronda Davis scored the lone run.

Stouffville coach Dave Miller felt his team had risen to the occasion, despite their eventual defeat.

"After the Pickering loss, the girls decided to really play some ball and knocked off a silver and bronze medal winning team from the Regional playoffs," he said. "They can hold their heads high, and we also thank the parents and fans for their encouragement. The groundskeepers and statisticians did a great job as well."

In the Tier 2 Division of the tournament, Guelph defeated Cobourg in the title match.

Merchants to compete at provincial Junior A tourney

The Stouffville Merchants will go into this weekend's Provincial Junior A Fastball Championships in Markham weakened by the loss of at least three of the players who carried them into the national tournament two weeks ago.

The Merchants, who took the overall Ontario Junior title in Grimsby in July, will contest the A only crown without the services of Tim Evans, John Batten and Chris Burkholder. Pitcher Scott Evans may also watch from the sidelines due to a back muscle injury.

Tim Evans, the Merchants' third pitcher behind Scott Evans and Byron Baraneski, is scheduled to return to Kent State University in Ohio, where he is a member of the school's hockey team.

Batten, a National Hockey League prospect in the Detroit Red Wings system, will be reporting for training camp this week. Burkholder suffered a broken thumb in the Canadian Junior Championships in Pont Rouge, Quebec, and will miss this weekend's competition.

The tournament, to be played at Centennial Park in Markham is to be made up of the top eight A level Junior fastball teams in the province. The action kicks off at 9 a.m. Saturday morning, with the title match set for 1 p.m. Sunday, with the tie breaker, if necessary at 3 p.m.

A special opening ceremony is scheduled for 11 a.m. Saturday, with dignitaries from the province, and the

Towns of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville in attendance.

Merchants' coach Fred Crawford admits his team will have its work cut out for it, given the manpower shortage and the inevitable let down after the highly charged Quebec tournament. "We'll be going with only 12 players, a far cry from the 19 we had in Quebec. I know I'll be able to get up for it personally, but it will be a matter of getting the players up. It will be tough without Tim Evans, Batten and Burkholder."

Crawford said it will be a toss up as to which team prevails. "There are some strong teams. Simcoe looks tough, as do Oshawa, Scarborough, Belleville and Peterborough."

Fastball season an experience for all

The yellow brick road experience of this year's Stouffville Merchants Junior fastball team has given us all, players and followers of the squad alike, an opportunity to get caught up in the excitement of softball at its best.

And, as Merchants' head coach Fred Crawford will attest to, it hasn't always been an easy journey.

His outfit, which Carl Myers put together back in the spring, started out as a fledgling local ball club, just another small town rep team with a goal of achieving respectability a few years down the road.

But when it was decided that Markham wouldn't be fielding a Junior outfit this season, the Merchants decided to merge with the town to the south. Suddenly, the squad had players like slugger Ryan MacIntyre, All-Canadian Craig Crawford, big John Batten, and Norm Depta to flank Stouffville area ace

hurlers Scott Evans and Byron Baraneski.

And, of course, there already was a fair Stouffville nucleus made up of the likes of Chris Burkholder, Jamie Showers, Jason Yoshida, Paul Sinclair, etc.

As the season progressed, these guys started to serve notice they would be tough to put down out on the diamond. And, with their meteoric rise, coach Crawford found he had his hands full getting all his players into the game, such was the team's body count.

The boys took a little time to get to know each other, meshing fully just in time to sweep the Ontario Junior championships in Grimsby last month.

The provincial victory won the Merchants a berth in the Canadian title tournament a few weeks back. And, as they were entitled to do, the Merchants picked up three ringers



sport notes

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from around the province, turning them into a crack unit, able to keep up with the best in the nation.

Which they did, with a couple of narrow 1-0 losses eliminating them from the championship match up.

But, inevitably, the small town rep team aura had diminished considerably once the team got to Pont Rouge, Quebec. And when it was all said and done, it was Barry Ellerbeck and Bob Rath, recruits from Kingston and North Fredericksburg, who had earned top billing out there in front of the 5,000 or so fans who would come

to every game.

Sure, the local boys were there too, and a few of them made genuine contributions to the Merchants' fourth place finish.

But the truth of the matter is that without the Markham boys and the recruits, the Merchants wouldn't have been anywhere near Pont Rouge while the Canadian championships were being played in that town.

Coach Crawford faced the inevitable task of having to pick the boys he felt could cut it against the best Junior pitchers in the country. And while there were probably some bruised egos, the bottom line was that all the players, even those who rode the pine, ended up enjoying a once in a lifetime experience.

Crawford, who had been to two national championships before, as a spectator and as a parent, said he found the camaraderie factor truly inspiring. The Merchants Scott Evans

and Craig Crawford renewed acquaintances with players they had met last summer while participating in the Canada Games Fastball Tournament in Saskatoon.

There was a respect afforded each other, said Crawford, that was heart warming. Win or lose, these highly talented boys recognized that the cream had risen to the top for this prestigious national competition.

Crawford admits the march to the nationals was a pressure cooker, with enough politics to qualify him as an honorary MP. He's not even sure he'll be back next year. All part of the price you pay to play with the big boys.

But whatever becomes of this local based club in the future, the summer of 1990 will be remembered by all associated with the team as the year a bunch of Stouffville area teens got to be a part of an adventure that few ever get to experience.