

stouffville sports

Merchants set for national contest

BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

It's all systems go for the Ontario Junior titlist Stouffville Merchants as the team prepares to leave for the Canadian Junior Championships in St. John's Newfoundland next week.

The Merchants, who are scheduled to play an Oshawa and District League contest versus the Oshawa Juniors at the town park tonight (Wednesday) at 8:30, will fly to the eastern province Friday (Aug. 9). The team is to hold a workout Saturday, before participating in their tournament's opening ceremonies Sunday.

The Stouffville squad is to be part of a six-team pool. The Merchants play Quebec Monday, Newfoundland Tuesday, Saskatchewan Wednesday, Alberta Thursday and Nova Scotia Friday.

The second pool consists of the defending champion Alberta team, British Columbia, Prince Edward

Women's softball championship this weekend

The top seven Sophomore Ladies softball teams in Ontario will gather at Stouffville's Memorial Park this weekend (Aug. 9-11) to contest the Provincial Women's Softball Association (PWSA) sophomore crown.

The action runs from Friday night through Sunday afternoon on the main diamond.

Friday night, it will be Hamilton versus Cobourg at 7 p.m. with the winner taking on Scarborough Saturday morning at 11 a.m.

Port Hope plays Newmarket Friday night 9 p.m., with North Bay and Thorold squaring off at 9 a.m. Saturday.

Island, New Brunswick and the second Newfoundland outfit.

The playoff round begins on the weekend immediately following the round robin.

Merchants' third baseman Chris Burkholder thinks his team has as good a shot as any to win it all.

"You've got to like our chances," Burkholder told The Tribune Friday. "We've got three top pitchers, and we have such a balanced bench."

Burkholder feels the Merchants participation in last year's national championships, when they finished fourth, served as a learning experience for the team.

"Last year we got all the jitters out."

Burkholder suggests that Saskatchewan will be the team to beat. "They (Saskatchewan) have beaten the defending champions from Alberta. They are a very strong team."

Scott Evans, who pitched for the Merchants last season, is now a member for the Saskatchewan outfit.

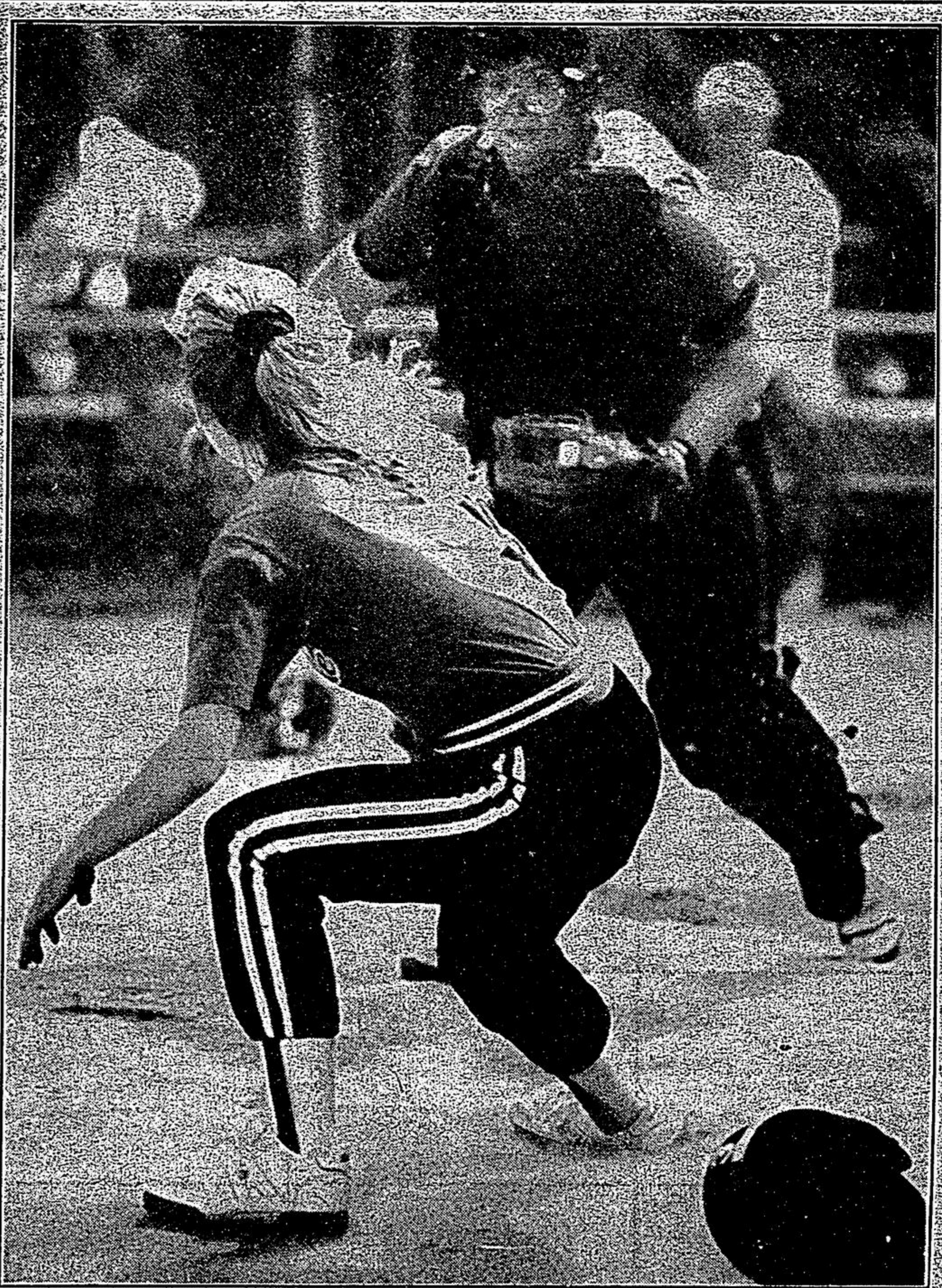
According to Burkholder, the Merchants had raised around \$24,000 by last Friday, towards the projected \$28,000 needed to fund the trip. He had nothing but praise for the town.

"The merchants of the Stouffville area have been great. We've had terrific support by the people here in reaching our financial goal."

The Merchants downed the Oshawa Navy team 5-1 in a road contest last Tuesday.

Glen Cole socked a home run, and combined with Darren Crawford to pitch for the Stouffville squad.

The Merchants are hoping to have recruits Barry Ellerbeck (Rideau Valley), Ron White (Sebringville), and Todd Martin (Owen Sound) in the lineup for tonight's game.



Photo/STEVE SOMERVILLE

No way out

Stouffville Stinger, Leanna Boyd gets caught between third and home as Uxbridge Precision Auto's catcher prepares to tag her out at the Uxpool diamond Wednesday. Stouffville won 13-9.

An abbreviated history of the Merchants

For Rob Parcels, or Bert as he is known to his Stouffville Merchants teammates, the road leading to next week's Canadian Junior fastball championships in St. John's Newfoundland goes all the way back to his Squirt season eight years ago.

And while he and the handful of Merchants that remain from his first few seasons in rep. ball make their second stab in two years at the national Junior title, the intense 20-year-old feels that this time the team has all the parts needed to come home with the gold.

Parcels and Keith Piette, the two Merchants who go back the furthest, have been the longest travellers on a yellow brick road which has seen some unlikely recruits through the years.

The pair hooked up with fellow Merchants Rich and Chris Burkholder and Chris Yoshida, in their first Pee Wee season in 1984.

Howard Burkholder, Rich and Chris's dad, also came aboard that season, taking over the coaching job



SPORT
NOTES

bruce stapley

he would maintain through the present, with last year being his last sabbatical season.

And of course Scott Evans joined the squad in Pee Wee, providing the pitching that would eventually land them an Ontario Bantam crown in 1987.

The band would also come to include the likes of Dan Larmer, Chris Winn, Jamie Showers and Dan Bell all of whom would go on to play with the team through the Midget ranks.

But just when it looked like the old gang was breaking up, the late Carl Myers set the wheels in motion in the winter of 1990 to field a Stouffville Junior team which would com-

bine the remainder of the Midget squad with their old rivals from Markham and Bradford.

Parcels, Piette, the Burkholder boys, Yoshida, Showers and Paul Sinclair got together with Markham mainstays Craig Crawford, Mike Clausner, Ryan McIntyre and Steve Whitson.

With Howard Burkholder committed to taking the year off, the troupe persuaded Fred Crawford, Craig's dad, into taking over the helm.

Evans was talked into returning after a year spent with the Ontario and Canadian national teams, as was this year's Ontario championship pitching phenomenon Byron Baranieski, whom Howard had pried away from Bradford the year before.

The team went all the way to the provincial title, playing a little over their heads, according to Parcels.

"I didn't think we'd win," recalls Parcels. "I thought we'd be in the top three or four maybe. The Merchants then picked up

pitcher Barry Ellerbeck from North Frontenac to bolster their roster for the national tournament in Pont Rouge Quebec — the same Barry Ellerbeck that Parcels and Stouffville Bantams had bested when they knocked out Napanee in their provincial eliminations victory in front of their home town faithful back in 1987.

Ellerbeck was masterful at the nationals, heading up the Merchants pitching staff. But a pair of 1-0 defeats sealed the team's fourth place finish.

This year Ellerbeck is back. Baranieski is hot, and a third pitcher, Owen Sound's Todd Martin, makes for what Parcels says might be the deepest staff at the national event.

Parcels contends that last year's experience at the high pressure All-Canadian competition provided the Merchants with a dry run.

"This time," he says, "it's the real thing."

"Last year it was a lot of fun to see the big crowds and just to be there. It was OK to finish fourth."

"This year, I think we can win it all. And with three top pitchers, we have more depth than Alberta and Saskatchewan (for whom Evans will be pitching)."

"Our defence is stronger, and while we don't have quite the same power as last year, we have a solid lineup. We can put five singles together in any inning."

Another key, says Parcels, is that the team has a greater feeling of unity, having had a year to mesh rivals of so many seasons.

As for himself, Parcels says he was a little disappointed he didn't get to play more in last summer's tournament. This time around, he's going to change all that.

And he insists that he, as well as the rest of the Merchants, are going to St. John's with one purpose in mind.

"Last year I just had fun. This year I want to play ball."