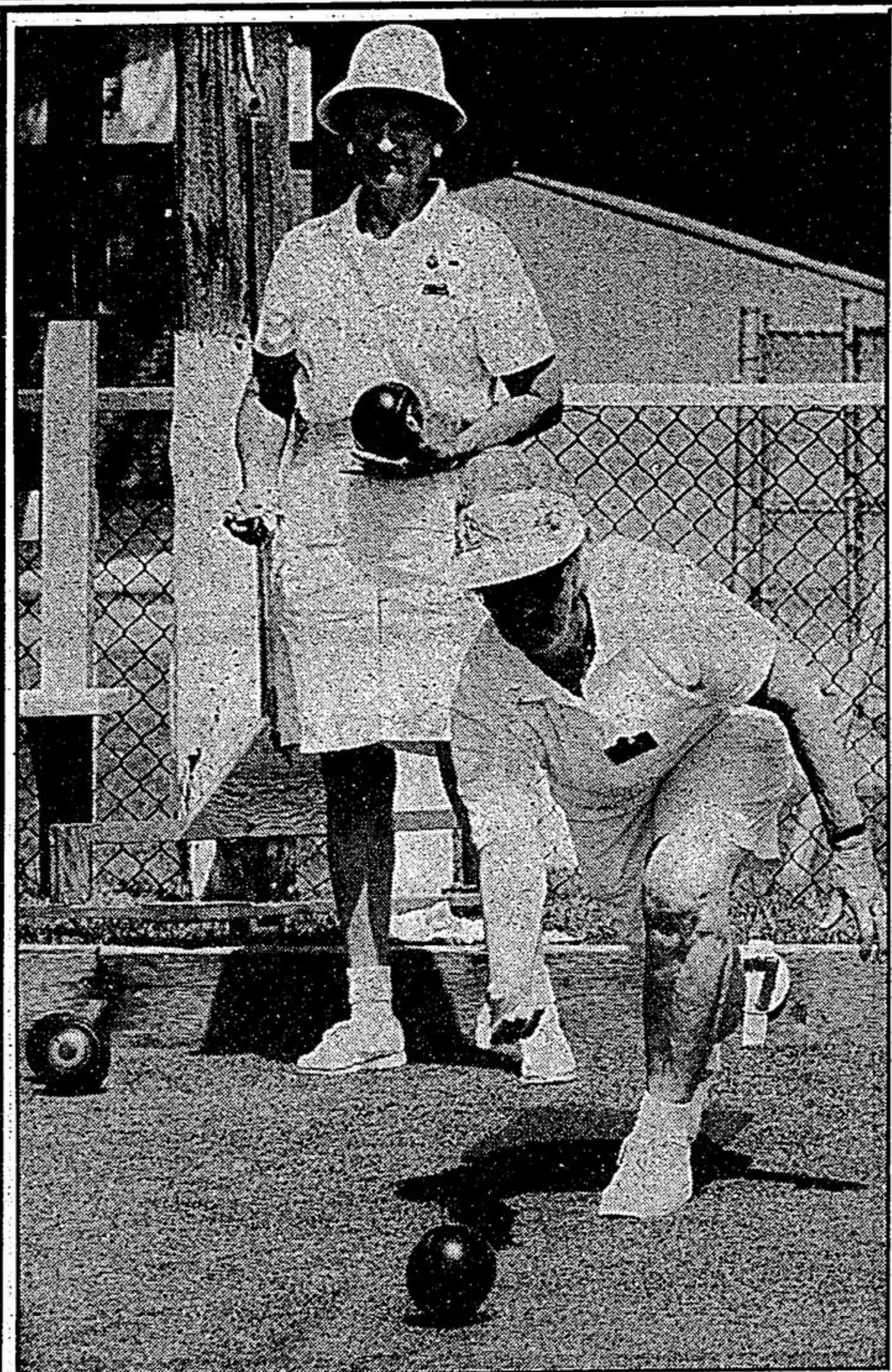


stouffville sports



Photo/CELIA BRONKHORST

Here it comes

Eleanor Hollidge (left), of the Newmarket Lawn Bowling Club, watches intently as Anne Jackson of the Stouffville Lawn Bowling Club, tosses her ball during action in Saturday's Fred Crossen Memorial Tournament at the Stouffville Lawn Bowling Club. Teams from Newmarket, Willowdale, Markham, Uxbridge and Stouffville took part in this event.

Merchants run out of luck at Provincials

The Stouffville Merchants were stopped by a familiar nemesis and an old ally at the Junior Men's Provincial Eliminations championship tournament at North Fredericksberg over the weekend.

The St. Catharines A's, who prevented the Stouffville team from three-peating at the 1992 Eliminations played here in town, handed the Merchants yet another heartbreaking loss to extend their hex.

Barry Ellerbeck, who was recruited by the Merchants for the 1990 and '91 Canadian Junior championships, put on a flame throwing exhibition to send his old mates home empty handed.

After winning their first three games, the Merchants appeared to have made it four in a row in Saturday night's game against St. Catharines.

With a 3-2 lead and two out in the last inning, pitcher Byron Baranieski struck out what would have been the final batter of the game.

But the ball eluded catcher Jason Underwood and got caught in the screen behind home plate, allowing the St. Catharines batter to scamper safely to first base. The next hitter drove the first pitch for a game-winning home run.

On Sunday, Ellerbeck struck out 19 Merchant batters as his Kemptville team eliminated the Stouffville squad from further competition with a 2-0 victory.

The Merchants managed to load the bases with none out in the second inning, but failed to capitalize.

Ellerbeck and company went on to contest the tournament championship, downing St. Catharines before losing to Sebringville in the final Sunday evening.

Under a new Ontario Amateur Softball Association (OASA) arrangement, both finalists are eligible to

contest the Canadian finals in Summerside, P.E.I. July 23-29.

The Merchants opened up the weekend with a 2-1 win over Smith's Falls Friday afternoon.

Baranieski was masterful and second baseman Rich Burkholder made a half a dozen sparkling defensive plays to key the victory.

Ryan MacIntyre hammered a towering homerun to direct the Merchants to a 7-1 triumph over Caledonia later that evening. Darren Crawford combined with Baranieski on the pitching rubber.

The Stouffville crew made it three straight with a 5-0 whitewash of Peterborough Saturday morning.

Jamie Showers picked up the game's MVP award, cracking a mammoth homer. Baranieski and Crawford earned the shutout, with Ryan Burkholder making a spectacular catch in left field to preserve the goose egg.

The Merchants trailed St. Catharines 1-0, then 2-1, before gaining the lead in the game that eventually broke their hearts. Underwood was a perfect four for four at the plate, while Showers had a key hit as well.

Merchants coach Howard Burkholder said it was a matter of lady luck turning her back on his team.

He felt his team would have gone on to the finals if St. Catharines hadn't made their miracle comeback.

"We've had some good luck at this tournament through the years, but luck went against us this time. But that's the way it goes in this game, I accept that. I was really happy with the guys, they played very well."

Burkholder said he is thinking of entering the team in the International Softball Congress Junior Men's tournament in Wisconsin July 29-Aug. 1.

The team will likely contest the Ontario Junior A championships in Owen Sound Aug. 13-15.

Bonisteel's bat sounds off

Margaret Bonisteel belted a home run to help power Fullerton's Place to a 21-13 win over Stouffville Co-op in recent Tuesday Night Ladies Softball League play.

Karen Lippett had a round tripper for Co-op.

In another game, Teresa Drew belted a home run to ignite Marianne's Variety to a 14-10 win

over Pink Flamingo.

Colley, Borland, and Vale managed to hold previously unbeaten White Rogers to a 4-4 stalemate.

Here's the scoop on what's hot and what's not in the world of sporting goods

Nine years after first setting up his little pro shop at the Rec Centre, Ian Boyd is hanging tough amid hard times in his well stocked sporting goods store in Stouffville's west end.

Ian, the affable entrepreneur with the "I can do it" approach to customer service, is still smiling despite a couple of years that have not been so kind to some retailers. And while he's not looking for this to be a record year, he'd like to believe the worst is behind us.

"I don't think we'll see the type of growth in this store we've had in the past this year," he told me when I dropped in to see what was new in sporting equipment the other day.

"But anyone who can stay in business this year should be okay in another year."

The secret to Ian's success soon became clear as he fielded a phone call from a prospective bicycle customer in Mississauga.

He set up an appointment, agreeing to stay a half an hour after closing to accommodate the customer, who has heard about the

Stouffville store through word of mouth.

Ian told me how the higher end has fallen off in bike sales this year as people stick to the \$300-500 range in an effort to keep within their diminishing budgets.

"But I anticipated that, and I ordered accordingly," he said.

"And our kids' bikes business has been great this year. Lots of stores don't bother with kids' bikes because there's not much money in them. But it's the kids' bikes that start your market and get people into the store for the first time."

Ian attributes the local boom in bike helmet sales partly to his trips to area schools pushing the importance of wearing the safety devices.

"I don't care if they buy them from me," he insisted.

"I just tell them to be sure they've got them."

Baseball equipment sales are holding their own this season, he cited.

With the establishment of the town's hardball program, it has



opened up a new market for him.

New trends include the switch from white to black baseball ball shoes, mimicking some of the pro ball players, as well as "tackified," or sticky leather, batting gloves.

Louisville Slugger TPS aluminum bats are still the rage, despite their \$150 price tag.

"Apparently, the ball just springs off the bat," said Ian, based on the feedback he's received. "The men's slo pitch players love them."

However, he reported the new composite, carbon fibre bats, which go for just under \$200, are not getting the same rave reviews.

The Worth Red Dot softball, used far and wide by slo-pitch leagues in these parts, may be on

the way out, Ian told me. Apparently, Worth is doing away with their distributor in Canada, and is looking to distribute the balls directly from their headquarters in Tennessee.

It sounds like a hassle to Ian, so he may have to switch to another ball.

Ian has noticed a big increase in water ski sales so far this year, a trend which began before the onset of summer.

He's even sold a few water ski boats at \$30,000 a pop, and has a demo on display in the back of the store.

Ian said the in line skate craze, while still apparent, has slowed a little, at least in his store.

He reports, however, a modest interest in tennis and ball hockey equipment, croquet gear, and inflatables.

While he doesn't get into golf clubs and related accessories, he is somewhat excited about a new line of "refurbished" golf balls that should be of interest to golfers looking to save a buck.

These name brand balls have

been fished out of water holes at the better golf clubs in Southern Ontario.

If they are without hacks or slices, they are resprayed, boxed by the dozen, and sold for a little more than half the price of the same thing brand new.

With retailers always thinking ahead, Ian is anticipating a banner year for hockey equipment sales.

"I see the best season ever for hockey equipment," he enthused. The reason, he added, has less to do with new advancements in state of the art gear than ever increasing interest in the sport.

A new Reebok pump to be installed inside an existing name brand skate should generate some interest, he predicted.

And as Ian wheels a bike just brought in for repairs by a customer into the back room, the phone rings and a young man comes in the door to pick up an order for a friend.

Just another day at work for the man whom kids and adults alike have come to count on to keep them in the game.