

Sports



Squeeze play

Alken's Pharmacy first baseman Justin Lyons (left), couldn't quite hold onto this relay throw which enabled Mrs. Wideman's Bakeshop's baserunner Mark Hutchinson to reach first base safely during action in Saturday's Stouffville Youth League baseball finals at the town park diamond.

PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

# Burkholder ball era comes to a conclusion

## SPORTS NOTES

bruce stapley



It may not exactly be the end of an era.

But Howard Burkholder's decision to step down as coach of the Stouffville Merchants junior men's fastball team next season certainly marks a turning point in a coaching career that goes back to when he first assembled a group of youngsters to play squirt softball here in town back in the early 1980s.

Howard, who has coached Stouffville teams to Ontario Amateur Softball Association provincial titles at the bantam and junior levels, has earned his stripes, both as a coach and as a sportsman, with the Merchants over the past four seasons.

Competing at a level where most teams with an eye on a national championship use cash as an incentive to attract top players, he succeeded on a strictly amateur basis.

He came within an ace of landing the Canadian junior crown in St. John's, Newfoundland back in 1991 when the Merchants finished third.

There were some who questioned his loyalty to the players who had brought him as far as St. John's that year, but he said he'd win or lose with his own players, and that's exactly what he did.

Howard came to the Merchants a year after the team had been formed.

When he decided to take a sabbatical in 1990 after two years coaching the Stouffville midgets, the late Carl Myers lined up Markham's Fred Crawford to coach a collection of Stouffville and Markham boys who had been arch rivals through their years of rep level minor ball over the years.

The team flourished, with Scott Evans, who had pitched and slugged the Stouffville bantams to an OASA crown in 1987, combining with newcomer hurler Byron Baranieski, a Newmarket area resident, to give the Merchants the provincial crown in their first try.

Howard repeated the feat without Evans the next season, with Baranieski emerging as one of the country's top hurlers while pitching the team all the way to the nationals at St. John's.

Howard came so close to landing a third straight provincial title when Stouffville hosted the OASA

Junior Men's Eliminations in 1992.

But lady luck turned her back in each of their last two attempts to regain the grail. They fell just short of taking the title at the International Softball Congress Junior Men's Fastball Championships in Rockford, Ill. earlier this summer.

As this season winds down, Howard can look back with pride at his coaching record, and at the success of the Merchants in their five years in the junior fastball scene.

He has had his disappointments to be sure.

A man for whom loyalty is everything, he has had to endure players who don't always follow through to the end.

But despite what he referred to in a recent chat as "the hills and valleys," he said he feels "very positive about the whole thing."

And while he likes to win as much as the next man, and knows how to do it, he has always insisted that winning is just part of what goes on out there on the ball field.

His fervent Christian beliefs have always dictated his course of action, and he's simply not given to compromise.

As for next season, it's up in the air as to just what will happen to the Merchants.

But one thing is for sure. This season will be the last year of minor ball for the four Merchants who have been together since Howard began coaching — sons Chris and Rich Burkholder, Jason Yoshida, and Keith Piette. Chris Burkholder and Yoshida are in their final years of junior eligibility this season, as is Baranieski.

Howard is quick to point out that, should a qualified coach come along, the Merchants will still have a nucleus consisting of quality players like Rich and Ryan Burkholder, Bill Pride, Darren Crawford, Jason Underwood, and Uxbridge residents Bob Ferguson and Brent Bonner. They would have to come up with an ace pitcher, however, if they were going to have a crack at the OASA title.

And while he's adamant he won't be coaching next season, Howard hasn't ruled out the possibility of returning in another year or two to coach a men's team which could include all the old gang.

In fact, given his own fastball abilities and the shape Howard has stayed in, he could even find himself out on the field with the boys contending for a championship some day.

I'd bet we haven't seen the last of Howard Burkholder on the Stouffville softball scene.

# Final summer volleyball tournament on Sept. 17

They'll be marking the end of the season with the End of Summer Volleyball Tournament Sept. 17 at Chariots Family Restaurant. The all day event will be open to mixed teams of two male and two female players each.

Cash prizes are to be awarded the first- and second-place finishing teams. Teams will pay a \$50 entry fee, with three games guaranteed in the round robin, pool play format.

Organizers are looking to duplicate the success of the

competition held at Chariots in early August, when 16 teams participated and proceeds went to Markham-Stouffville Hospital.

The Sept. 17 tournament will see proceeds directed to the Big Brothers of York Region.

# Bruins mini-camp was a success

A proposed "mini-camp" put on by the Uxbridge Bruins to view prospective young talent turned out to be more like a

stampede over the weekend. Sixty bantam and midget aged skaters flocked to the Uxbridge Arena to strut their stuff for the Junior C team's pre-season auditions.

The players engaged in three scrimmage sessions last Saturday and Sunday.

Bruins assistant coach Gary Forsyth said the team was pleased with both the turnout and calibre of the players.

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**DON VALLEY NORTH LEXUS - TOYOTA**

**ATHLETE OF THE WEEK**



**LISA SIMES**

Lisa Simes came up with an excellent performance at the recent Commonwealth Games in Victoria, B.C. The Markham Winstoneettes gymnast earned two bronze medals at the games in the individual vault and floor events.

The 17-year-old native of Regina also came close to winning two more medals as she finished fourth in the individual beam and all-round events. Simes hopes to continue her success at the upcoming Canadian national team trials in Montreal. A good performance there will enable her to represent Canada at this year's world championships in Germany.

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