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Spirit hope to reel in Muskies tonight

BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

The Spirit of Stouffville brass are looking for a big crowd and a solid effort when the team takes to the Rec Centre ice surface against the Lindsay Muskies tonight at 7:30 p.m.

The Spirit will be out to record their second win of the Provincial Junior A Hockey League season after dropping four in a row since their impressive season-opening victory over the Couchiching Terriers on Sept. 18.

The match with the Muskies kicks off a busy weekend that sees the Spirit travel to Collingwood to play the Blues on Friday, then to Newmarket to face off against the 87's Hurricane on Sunday.

Spirit general manager Clive

Moody said the Stouffville squad must come up big in their six games against Lindsay this season if they are to entertain hopes of post-season play.

He thinks the fans who come out tonight will be treated to an entertaining match.

"We're looking forward to a good crowd against Lindsay," said Moody. "They are one of the teams we have to beat for a playoff spot."

MUSKIES HAD THE SPIRIT LAST YEAR

The Spirit managed only one win in eight tries against the Muskies last season on their way to a last-place finish in the Provincial league east conference Phillips Division.

With the vast overhaul that has resulted in a bigger, more aggressive Spirit squad this season, Moody and Co. are expecting improvement.

But the GM has made it known he's not happy with the team's record of one win and four defeats.

"We expect our players to

perform at a higher level."

Moody said he and his scouting staff are "actively pursuing" reinforcements to help put the team over the top.

"We're not at liberty to divulge the moves we're looking to make to strengthen our hockey club. But they will involve trades or OHL players coming in. We will fulfill our commitment of putting a competitive team on the ice."

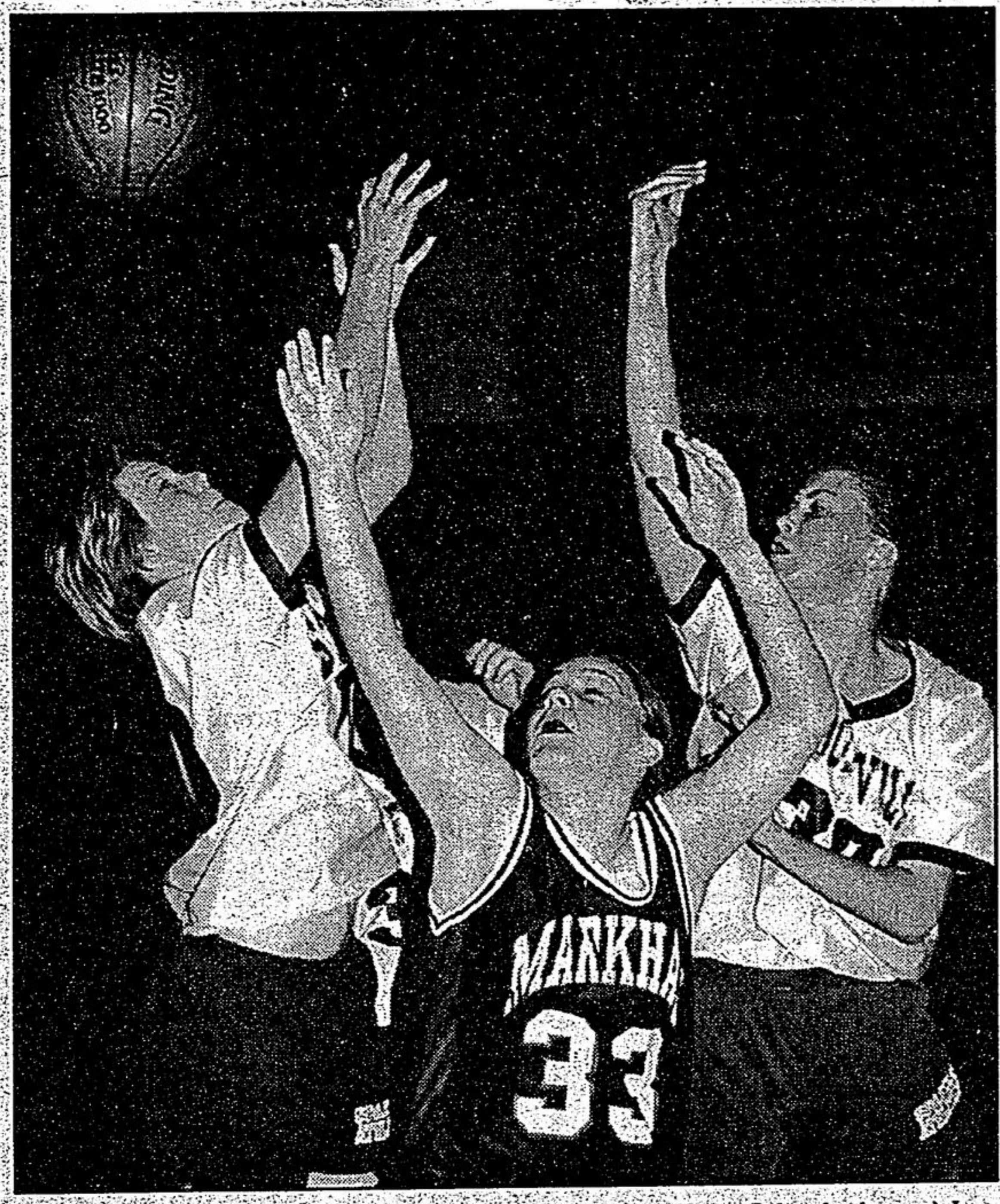
Spirit head coach Dan Larmer has claimed from the outset that his team is in tough this season.

"We're in what is probably the toughest (Tier 2 Jr. A) division in the country," he said. "Newmarket, Aurora and Collingwood are all among the best 20 teams in Canada."

Larmer said he sees signs of progress despite his team's lack of wins.

"It's slowly starting to come together. The guys are working hard."

The Spirit play host to the Collingwood next Thursday evening.



REACH FOR THE SKY: Stouffville District Secondary School players' Jen May (left) and Laura Boyd (far right), try to out jump Markham District High School's Christine Carruthers for this ball during action in Tuesday's YRAA senior girls' basketball game at Stouffville District Secondary School. The visiting Marauders won the game 51-29.

Photo by SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Senior Spartans hope to spike it rich

Jim Fletcher will be the first to admit the recent stoppage of the Stouffville Secondary School (SDSS) extra-curricular sports program served as a severe cramp to this style.



Sports Notes

Bruce Stapley

Ever since coming to the school from Summitview P.S. back in the 1980's, the Fletch has reveled in coaching the senior Spartans boys' volleyball team each fall.

Taking a group of relative greenhorns each September, he never failed to transform the team into the York Region Athletic Association AA champions.

This was done by practicing relentlessly, before school, at lunch time, after school and Wednesday nights for two hours.

His dedication knew no bounds as he arranged numerous Saturday tournaments in an attempt to bring the boys up to speed.

It all added up to countless hundreds of after school

hours, and though his wife wasn't always thrilled with his frequent absences, it was in the blood.

But with his team yanked over a disciplinary issue last fall and this year's late start, things just aren't what they used to be.

And that's not to mention the school's decision to move up to the AAA level and compete with the bigger York Region schools with twice the student bodies a few years back.

But you won't hear Fletch whining. He's as excited as ever now that he's back in the saddle again.

While all other teams in the league started practices in early September, Fletch's boys must now play catch up.

He's doing all he can to make up for lost time. His boys started by entering a tournament in Mississauga on Sept. 27 after only three days practice.

They lost their first six matches at the event, but then started to find their form as they took three of their final four.

They won two of three in an exhibition set with Markville S.S. two days later, then opened the season the next day by being swept by powerhouse Unionville H.S.

It was off to another tourney in Port Perry last Saturday, with tournament dates also set for Oct. 17 and 25, with another pending.

As for his players, Fletch is as always singing their praises, looking as much to their potential as to what they may have already accomplished.

He's particularly high on Mark Burkholder, who has made the move all the way from midget level.

Brad Clark, Kevin McGowan, Reuben Canaard, Aaron Altman, Andrew Eager, Ian Hazlewood and Dave Whitelaw have graduated from last year's junior Spartans.

Returning seniors Shawn Caramanico, Brendon Newton and Ken McDonald round out the squad, and Fletch has plans for them all. He's also delighted to have SDSS staffer Elaine Alexiou as his assistant coach this season.

Fletch says his boys will be there when the playoffs begin Nov. 4 at Markville.

And he would love nothing better to be in Windsor for the annual Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association showdown from Nov. 21, 22.

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	Friday, November 7	8:00 p.m.	North York

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Friday
Markham Centennial Centre
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