

Sports & Leisure

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Acton still proud to call Stouffville his home



Sports Notes

Bruce Stapley

If you should see Keith Acton out for a run on the streets of Stouffville early some morning this summer, don't pass him by without a friendly "hello."

For despite the fact Keith and his family only get to spend a couple of months in town each year, the truth is that the old home town has come to take on an even greater importance to this veteran of 14 National Hockey League playing seasons and four more as an assistant coach.

Keith made that point abundantly clear during our telephone conversation after he agreed to be the New York Rangers assistant coach last Thursday.

He said it's important to him and his family that he always be seen as just another member of the community in the town he has never stopped loving.

"Stouffville has always been good to me," he said. "I just want to be a regular guy there."

He said he sometimes wonders if residents who have stood behind him in his NHL ventures know just how vital they have been to him.

"The people of Stouffville have no idea of how they make me feel. They've always supported me in everything I've done. They've been behind me, they've given me the prerequisite to move on and do well in life."

He also allowed how much he appreciated the local press keeping in touch when there's a change involving his career, enabling the folks back home to keep tabs on him.

IS STILL ONE OF THE BOYS

Keith said he enjoys nothing more than chatting it up with the boys

when he stops in to a donut shop after his morning run here during his annual summer down time.

"I just want to be one of the boys. I would never want anyone to think that I was any better than they are."

He told me he was in the middle of packing up when I called him at his home in Cherry Hills, N.J.

"I've got the for sale sign on the lawn. We're on the move."

With the final stages of his NHL career taking him on a whirlwind tour of Minneapolis, Edmonton, Philadelphia, Washington, and New York, it was almost a luxury to be able to settle into Philly for the past four years.

"It's amazing all the stuff you accumulate in four years," he said.

Keith reminisced a little as he thought of how he was going to be reunited in New York with Wayne Gretzky, Craig MacTavish and John Muckler, all of who were with the Edmonton Oilers when Keith played a role in their 1988 Stanley Cup triumph.

"I still remember how they held a special night for me at the Legion in Stouffville when I came home that summer," he recalled with pride.

After a week or so of wrestling with his decision to leave the Flyers and move on to the Rangers, Keith was just looking forward to coming home to a place where there are no tough calls to make, just the friendly faces of old friends and neighbours.

It may be corny, but Keith conjures up images of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz when he insists there's no place like his Stouffville home for himself and his family. There's no planes to catch, no won-lost records to worry about, no pressure to advance in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

And as always he was anxious to return to his roots in time for the Strawberry Festival celebrations that have come to define Stouffville in recent years.

"Stouffville has been the one constant in our lives," he said.



A FUNDAMENTALLY SOUND APPROACH: Stouffville batter Chad Wilson lays down a good bunt during this Whitchurch-Stouffville Squirt Select Fastball Tournament contest against Pickering at the Town Park diamond on Saturday.

Photo by STEVE SOMERVILLE

Minor bantam Clippers set for overseas excursion

A Stouffville rep. level boys' hockey team is to embark on a three-country exhibition tour over the Christmas holidays.

The two-week junket will see the minor bantam Clippers visit the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association (WSMHA) squad is to play six games against teams from the three countries. The trip also includes extensive sight-seeing at the European destinations. The Clippers are scheduled to leave on Dec. 26 and return home on Jan. 8.

Clippers assistant coach Brent Gibson said the idea for the trip has been building since late winter of this year.

"We threw it around back in March and then put it altogether," said Gibson. "We got the OMHA's (Ontario Minor Hockey Association) final approval in early May."

The Clippers first stop is Prague, Czech Republic, where they stay for two days. Then it's off to Munich, Germany, for four days, followed by a day in Innsbruck, Austria. They close out the trip with a

three-day stop in Salzburg, Austria, and an overnight stay in Plzen, Austria.

The Clippers are to engage in an extensive fund-raising program to help finance the expedition. They plan to hold a golf tournament Aug. 11 at the Maples of Ballantrae. A massive hockey tournament including from 150-200 teams from novice through midget levels is scheduled for Sept. 10-13. The competition is to be held at the Rec Centre and at the Ice Gardens at York University. The team might also host a dance in the fall.

Gibson said the Clippers roster is all but set. "We've filled all but three or four positions," said Gibson, who said the team is made up primarily of players from last year's major pee-wee Clippers team.

Team members include Tyler McMaster, Sean Burns, Marcus D'annunzio, Cameron O'Neil, Kyle Accionne, Andy Gibson, Matthew Wright, Kyle Sandiford, Robert Steckley, Michael Cornacchia, Nick Hawkins, Andrew McKay, Devon Cullen and Lucas Hunter. Trevor Zimmerman is coach, Joe Cornacchia manager, and Nelo Hunter assistant manager.

Four division titles up for grabs in slow-pitch tourney

Upwards of 40 teams are expected to take to the diamonds at Memorial Park and next to the Ballantrae Community Centre for the 19th Annual Williamson Leasing Slow-Pitch Tournament this weekend.

The Strawberry Festival tourney gets under way Friday at 7 p.m., running through Saturday, with the championship games Sunday afternoon.

The competition is to include four divisions. The mixed division will consist of roughly 10 teams with the Men's Recreational flight as high as 16. A Men's D division is to include from eight to 10 squads, with the Open category to

be capped at six crews.

The tournament is to be run on a round-robin basis, with the bigger divisions to be divided into two flights. The top teams in each division earn a bye, with the next two teams playing a semi-final to determine who is to contest the championship.

One of the teams which is expected to attract attention is a reunion squad made up of the core players from the Kerry Industrial team which began playing out of Stouffville almost two decades ago.

Last year's Rec champions, Stouffville's Farm Boys, have

been moved up a notch to the D division.

More than half of the teams in the Mixed, Rec and D divisions are of local origin. The Open division includes no Stouffville teams, with the Paramedics from Uxbridge among the teams contesting that top-level category. Teams from the Greater Toronto Area round out the lineup.

A beer garden is to run the Memorial Park tennis courts throughout the tournament. The local Pizza Pizza franchise will run a food court. A host of rock music videos are to be shown on a screen in the tennis court area as part of a dance Saturday night.