

SPORTS

Watson is a popular hit on the fastpitch diamond circuit

Various fastpitch clubs in Canada and the United States have sought the services of the 34-year-old Claremont resident

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

Rob Watson is thinking about retiring—not from his job as an elementary school teacher in Scarborough, but from his career as a jet-setting amateur fastpitch player who has spent the past decade in pursuit of that sport's global holy grail.

While the 34-year-old Claremont resident realizes the day is approaching when he'll no longer be able to catch up to pitches thrown by the likes of fastpitch icons Darren Zack and Todd Martin, he's showing no signs of slowing down.

At the recent Perth Shootout invitational tournament, a prestigious competition that included the world's top pitchers, Watson won the batting championship with an astronomical .626 average.

Playing in front of crowds of 3,000, his efforts at the plate and on the field helped his New York-based team place second behind last year's International Softball Congress (ISC) championship squad from Wisconsin.

SWUNG A HOT BAT IN 1997

He also batted at a hefty .600 clip while playing with the 1997 United States championship/1996 ISC title-winning Tampa Bay Smokers for a recent one-week series of exhibition



ROB WATSON

Veteran performer is having a ball this summer.

games against competition including the New Zealand national team and local all-star outfits.

Meanwhile, he played a big part as his regular team, the Scarborough Thunder, finished third in the Ontario ISC Travel League standings last week to qualify for the 1998 ISC finals to be held in Madison, Wis. beginning Aug. 9.

The Thunder are one of three Ontario teams to advance to the world finals.

Watson plans to tune up for the world event by joining the Tampa Bay team for this week's \$20,000 Halifax tournament.

Watson, who still manages to find time to play with the Claremont Rebels of the Oshawa City and District softball League on occasion, joined the Thunder along with his 35-year-old brother, Tom, at the start of this season.

Rob spent the past two seasons on the ISC circuit with teams from Boston (1996) and Wisconsin (1997).

The Wisconsin squad was 14th in last year's ISC championships.

Watson was on the Toronto Gators team that won the ISC crown in 1993.

HAS A BUSY SCHEDULE

Watson is on the road every weekend during the season with the Thunder as they set their sights on the 64-team world showdown.

"It all comes down to the ISC championships," he said. "I'm hoping we do well. You shoot for the top 20. You want to win at least four games."

While fastball is his first love, Watson has also known success

in hockey.

He went to the University of San Diego on a hockey scholarship from 1983-87, and went on to play semi-pro hockey in that city from 1988-90.

Watson also caught on with the San Diego university baseball team.

"They said they'd give me a one-day tryout, and they were happy with what they saw," said Watson, who was also the first Canadian ever named to the university's baseball team.

Despite a dizzying pace that sees him play two to three nights each week in Ontario as well as weekend tournament play across North America, Watson says he's having the time of his life on the diamond.

"Absolutely," he replied when asked if it was still fun. "I enjoy it very much. I've done a lot of travelling."

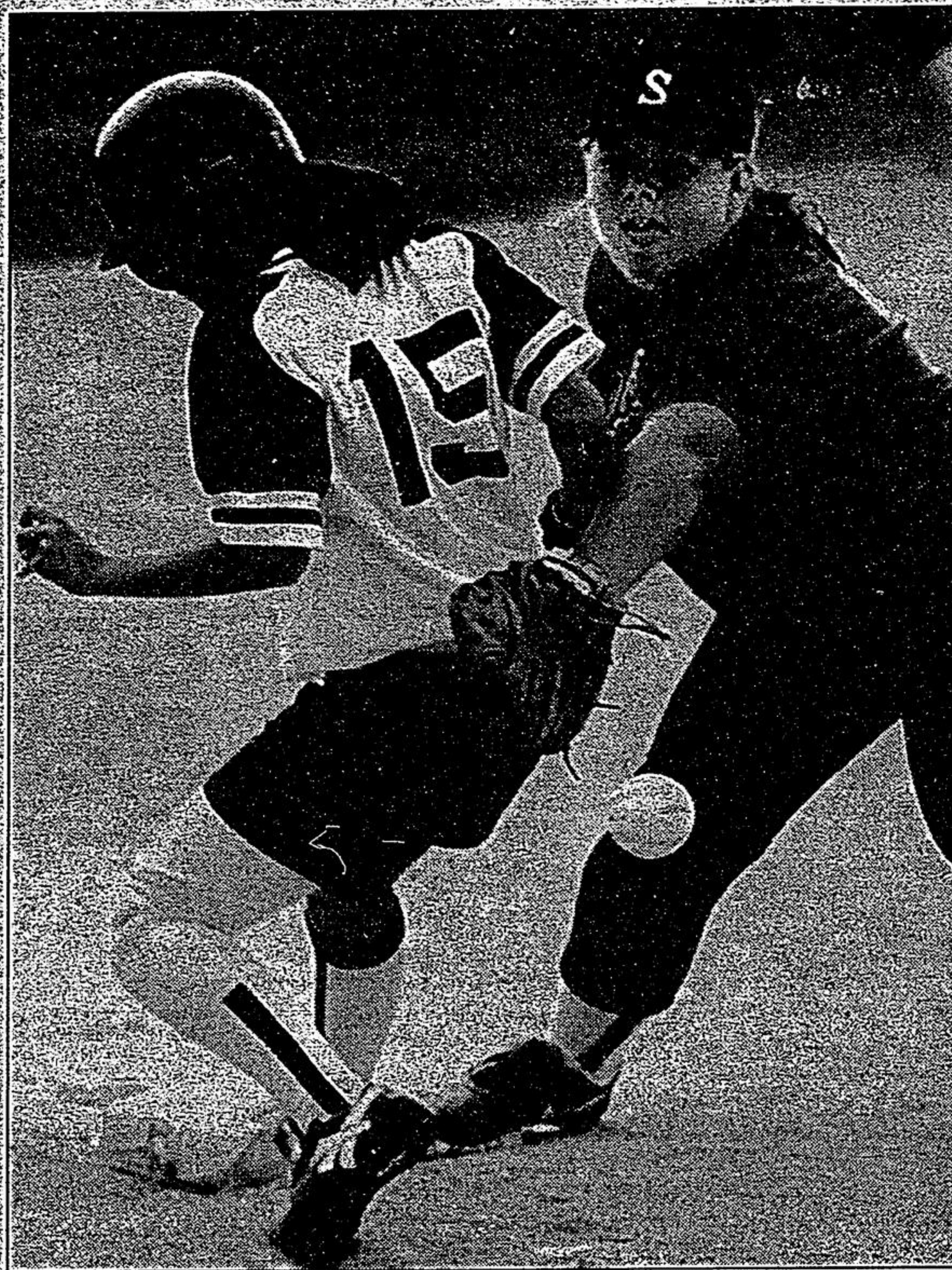
However, he's realistic enough to understand it can't go on forever.

"I think I'm near the end of playing at this level," he said. "I've been in the world (ISC) tournament every year for the past nine years."

When he's done chasing after ISC titles, he's looking forward to playing more games with the Claremont Rebels and getting involved in minor softball in his hometown.

The Rebels are a great bunch of guys, and it's great to be able to walk to the park for a change.

"I'd also like to coach in Claremont and run a few sports camps here like we do in Scarborough with the Thunder. I see it like a payback. I've really enjoyed playing ball through the years."



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

Stouffville third baseman Michelle Grey (right), tries to tag Aurora Digger baserunner Megan Cote in a pickoff play during Saturday's Provincial Women's Softball Association Novice Girls Qualifier first-round contest at the town park. The ball, however, squirted loose from Grey's glove. Aurora won this game 3-0.

Novice girls finish sixth at provincial qualifier

The host team was hurting, but they still managed to put on a credible show at the 11-team Provincial Women's Softball Association (PWSA) Novice Girls Qualifier held over the weekend at the town park.

The Stouffville novice girls' rep squad placed sixth overall, winning one of their three games while coming close in another.

The local outfit was forced to play with a short-staffed roster and an assortment of injuries.

The three-day tournament saw Newmarket go undefeated to take the

title. Georgetown was second with Owen Sound placing third.

The top three teams go on to contest the PWSA finals in Sarnia in August.

The Stouffville crew started off with a tough 3-0 loss to league rival Aurora in their opener Saturday morning.

Stouffville pitcher Jessie Carnite struck out 10 Aurora batters.

The game was scoreless until Aurora picked up a run in the fifth.

See INJURIES, page 16.



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