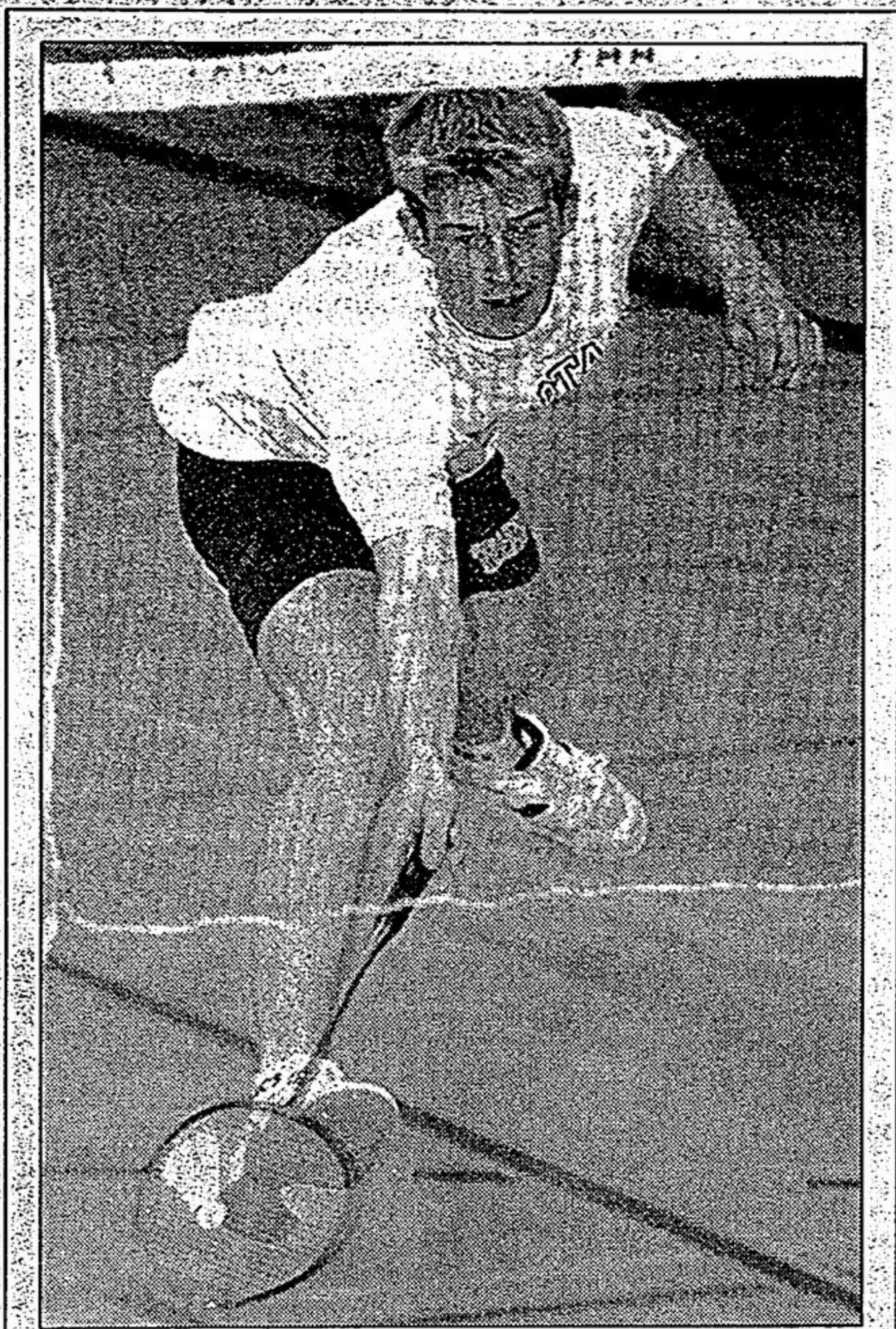


SPORTS: Semester change allows SDSS physical education teacher to return to coaching ranks



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

STRETCHING IT TO THE LIMIT

Stouffville District Secondary School's Will Crothers stretches it to the limit in an attempt to return the shuttlecock during Monday's YRAA Zone E and F singles' playdown against Jason Dun of Middlefield Collegiate Institute at Father McGivney Academy. Crothers took the match 2-1 and advances to the York Region finals on April 22 in Newmarket.

Fletcher is back in the fold

Seven may be the lucky number now that Ontario has lifted the ban on craps in its casinos.

But for sports-minded students at Stouffville District Secondary School, six is the magic number.

That's how many 75-minute classes teachers are now required to teach every two days, down from the 6 1/2 that led to the curtailment of extracurricular athletics at the school last spring. And nobody could be happier than 16-year veteran SDSS physical education teacher, coach and all round sports fanatic Jim Fletcher.

Fletcher was born to coach. With the return to the six-out-of-eight schedule in February, enabling teachers to resume volunteer coaching, he's been like a director of a three-ring circus juggling phys ed classes, badminton and volleyball tournaments.

This soon became apparent when I tried to catch up to him for results of the recent Area F badminton tournament.

Taking notes on the fly, I first tracked him down in the physical education office, where he was dishing out pats on the back to students whose pledge sheets for the school's annual Jump Rope For Heart fundraiser are overflowing.

Then it was out to the school track. There, he encouraged a Grade 11 boys' phys ed class as they warmed up by running a few laps in the freezing early April wind.

Back to the gym where he supervised the co-op students as they set up the badminton nets and split the class into pairs.

"I'm busy," the man known by students and fellow staffers alike as "The Fletch" acknowledged when I suggested he had his hands full with teaching and



Bruce Stapley

tournaments. "My wife hates me," he shrugged, allowing that his return to coaching has meant that he is once again accompanying SDSS teams to tournaments on Saturdays as well as til as late as 11 p.m. on week nights.

For Fletcher, the payoff is seeing the joy on the faces of the student-athletes.

"Every coach I know does it for the feed back from the kids. You're in something together with them."

He says he's no different from the English teacher who gets all wrapped up in the school drama. But it can only happen, he cautions, if teachers' class loads

are kept realistic.

"I'm teaching six classes again like I've been used to. Any more than that and it's impossible to find time to coach."

Provided the six-class limit stays in effect for next year, Fletcher says he'll be back at the helm of the SDSS senior boys' volleyball team in the fall.

With nine YRAA championships under his belt, in addition to six titles in the old Durham-York set up, this will be like slipping on a comfortable old sweat-shirt.

Like other teacher-coaches at SDSS, Fletcher is determined to give the SDSS athletes something to put in their high school scrapbooks. The phys ed office is plastered from ceiling to floor with stories from the local press celebrating victories of Spartans teams throughout the years. And Fletcher always knows what his notable volleyball alumni are up to.

"Nice talking to you Stap," he bids as I turn to go with my notes. "And don't forget to come out for Jump Rope For Heart next week!"



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