

Economist & Sun • Stouffville Tribune

SPORTS

RUGBY: Stouffville resident to handle play-by-play of Saturday's Canada-U.S. rugby match

O'Connor is set to tackle rugby broadcast

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

A Stouffville sports personality will help make North American rugby history on Saturday.

Lindsay O'Connor is to be the play-by-play radio announcer as the Canadian men's rugby team takes on its United States counterpart in an exhibition game at Fletcher's Fields in Markham.

The game is part of the Epson Pacific Rim Test Match series, an annual event organized by the International Rugby Board.

The broadcast gets under way at 4 p.m. across southern Ontario and northern New York State on the Telemedia Network, which includes The FAN 590 in Toronto.

"It's the first time in North America that an international rugby game has been broadcast live on a major radio station," said O'Connor, who along with his partner Peter Irvine host The FAN'S International Sports Report Saturday afternoons.

The game will also be televised Canada-wide on the CTV network, and will be carried internationally on the Real Audio Internet site.

O'Connor is to be accompanied in the broadcast booth by two prominent Ontario Rugby Union officials, including a former national level player.

The two will provide the colour commentary. Irvine is to conduct on the ground interviews as part of the broadcast.

Doing rugby play-by-play is nothing new for O'Connor.

"I've done rugby on television for the BBC when teams from Australia, England, France and Wales were playing here," he said.

O'Connor began his broadcasting career giving rugby related reports in his native New Zealand before coming to Canada 12 years ago.

He is in his fourth year co-hosting the International Sports Report. The two-hour show provides scores, inside stories and interviews on sports falling outside the mainstream North American market.

O'Connor said the June 19 contest at the Woodbine and 19th Avenue rugby



Stouffville resident Lindsay O'Connor (foreground), along with his FAN 590 broadcast partner Peter Irvine (background) will handle the play-by-play of Saturday's Epson Pacific Rim rugby test match featuring Canada and the U.S. from Fletcher's Fields in Markham.

facility should be a hard-fought affair.

"A US-Canada rugby game is always about bragging rights," he said.

The Pacific Rim series also includes teams from Western Samoa, Fiji and Japan. The teams play a home-and-home set with each other over a two-month period, with an overall champion decided at the end.

Canada is looking to defend its title.

"It's a build up to the World Cup of Rugby in Europe this fall," said O'Connor, who will travel to France with the Canadian team for its first World Cup match in October.

But while Canada should be competitive in the Pacific Rim rugby competition, this country still has a ways to go before it becomes a legitimate World Cup contender.

O'Connor, however, feels Canada's fledgling rugby program is getting bigger.

"Rugby is growing in Canada."

He said women are taking to the game in greater numbers than men, and an increasing number of schools

have introduced the game. Stouffville District Secondary School fielded its first ever girls' rugby team this spring. With minimal equipment required, and tackles involving wrapping the arms around a player instead of football-style smashes, rugby is less dangerous than many think, said O'Connor.

"It's not as rough as people say it is. It's not as rough as football."

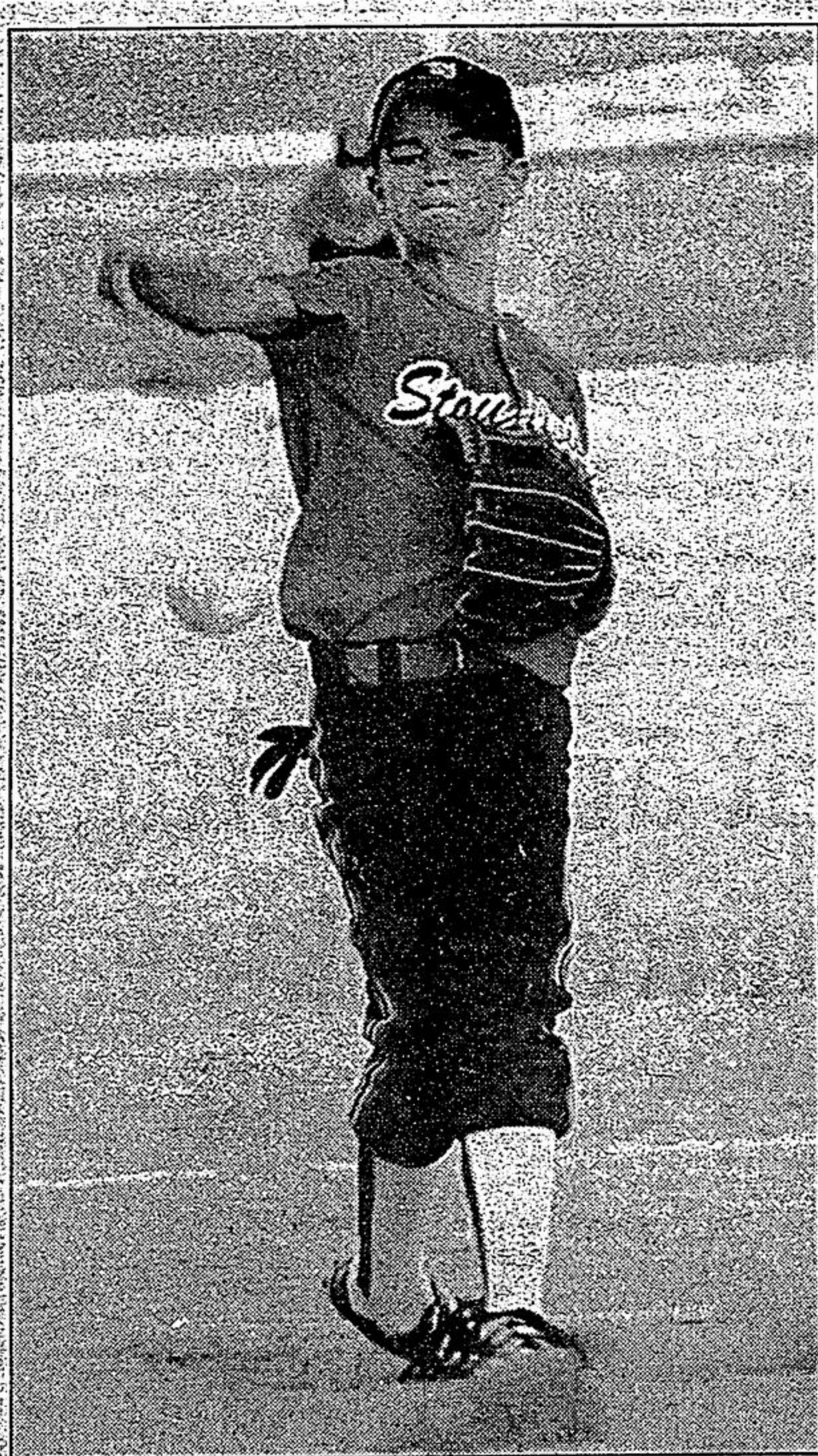
O'Connor said Canada is ranked 18th heading into this year's World Cup.

"For a nation that has mainly amateur players, we've done pretty well."

Most members of the national rugby team play professionally in Europe or Japan, he said.

This summer will also see O'Connor involved with the Canadian men's soccer team. He is to travel to St. Kitts with the national squad team in July to report on that Caribbean island's annual soccer festival.

O'Connor and Irvine broadcast their International Sports Report from the Strawberry Festival at the town park on July 3.



PHOTO/CHERYL JOHNSON

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Stouffville pitcher Kevin MacMillan delivers this offering to a Peterborough batter in a recent squirt boys' rep fastball contest at the town park. Stouffville won the game 10-1.

Buckley is ready to take next step

At the tender age of 15, Grant Buckley has the savvy of a veteran hockey player.

The former Stouffville Clipper has already experienced living away from home for a spell, won an Ontario championship, flown across the continent on a road trip, and now finds himself the first pick in the recent inaugural Ontario Hockey League draft of bantam aged players.

He's even got himself an agent.

And now he finds himself in Don Cherry's corner.

"He's a really nice guy," Grant said upon meeting the bombastic Cherry after being selected by Cherry's Mississauga Ice Dogs. "He's straight shooting. I like that."

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