

SPORTS

Brennan digs beach volleyball

Unionville resident hopes to spike provincial title

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

While a lot of people enjoy the beach during the summer months to soak in the sun's rays or take a dip in the water, Jordan Brennan has a different reason for taking to the sand.



JORDAN BRENNAN
Says beach game is more challenging

For the 20-year-old Unionville resident, a trip to the beach means serving a volleyball to an opponent, setting up a teammate or spiking it for a point or side out.

This season, Brennan and his partner, Elie Shermer of Toronto, are experiencing a satisfying campaign on the Ontario Volleyball Association's Age Division Beach Volleyball Series.

Taking to various beaches across the province in the series' junior category (under 21), the pair has won one tournament while finishing third in four others and was eliminated in the quarter-finals in another.

Forming a team last year, the pair entered in the junior national championships, which begins today and concludes Sunday at Wasaga Beach. A third-year beach player, the 6-foot-3 Brennan says there's a little extra incentive to do

well as he is in the final year of junior eligibility.

"Elie and I have made a lot of sacrifices like training three, four or five times a week. We've been going to bed at 11 at night and getting up at 5 in the morning to drive to the different tournaments."

"It's been a productive summer. Hopefully it'll pay off."

A former player at Unionville High School and on the club circuit with JCC and various regional and Toronto all-star teams, Brennan was sold on the beach game after meeting 1996 Canadian Olympic bronze medalists John Child and Mark Heese at a volleyball camp just after the Summer Games concluded.

"They are like the founding fathers of beach volleyball in Canada," Brennan said of the two Olympians. "Because we only have five months of a beach season whereas other countries can do it year round, they never expect Canada to be one of the top countries in the world. So (their accomplishment) was a big deal."

With the beach game escalating in popularity over the last few years, Brennan aspires to become a professional beach player and to represent Canada at the 2004 Summer Olympics.

"I see (beach volleyball) as the sport of the 21st century. The FIVB (Federation of International Volleyball) had four stops at Ashbridges Bay last year and this year and it was amazing. They had incredible attendance."

"The sport has made leaps and bounds and it's gotten big in the last four

years. It combines sun, sand and sex. What you see are good looking people sponsored by beer companies like Labatt in Canada and Miller in the U.S."

Currently a second-year business major at the University of Western Ontario, Brennan points out the beach game is a far tougher version to play than its traditional indoor cousin.

"To run on sand is more difficult," he points out. "It's also more of a technical game because you have to be more of an all-round better player. You have to do every skill well or the opposition will expose your weaknesses."

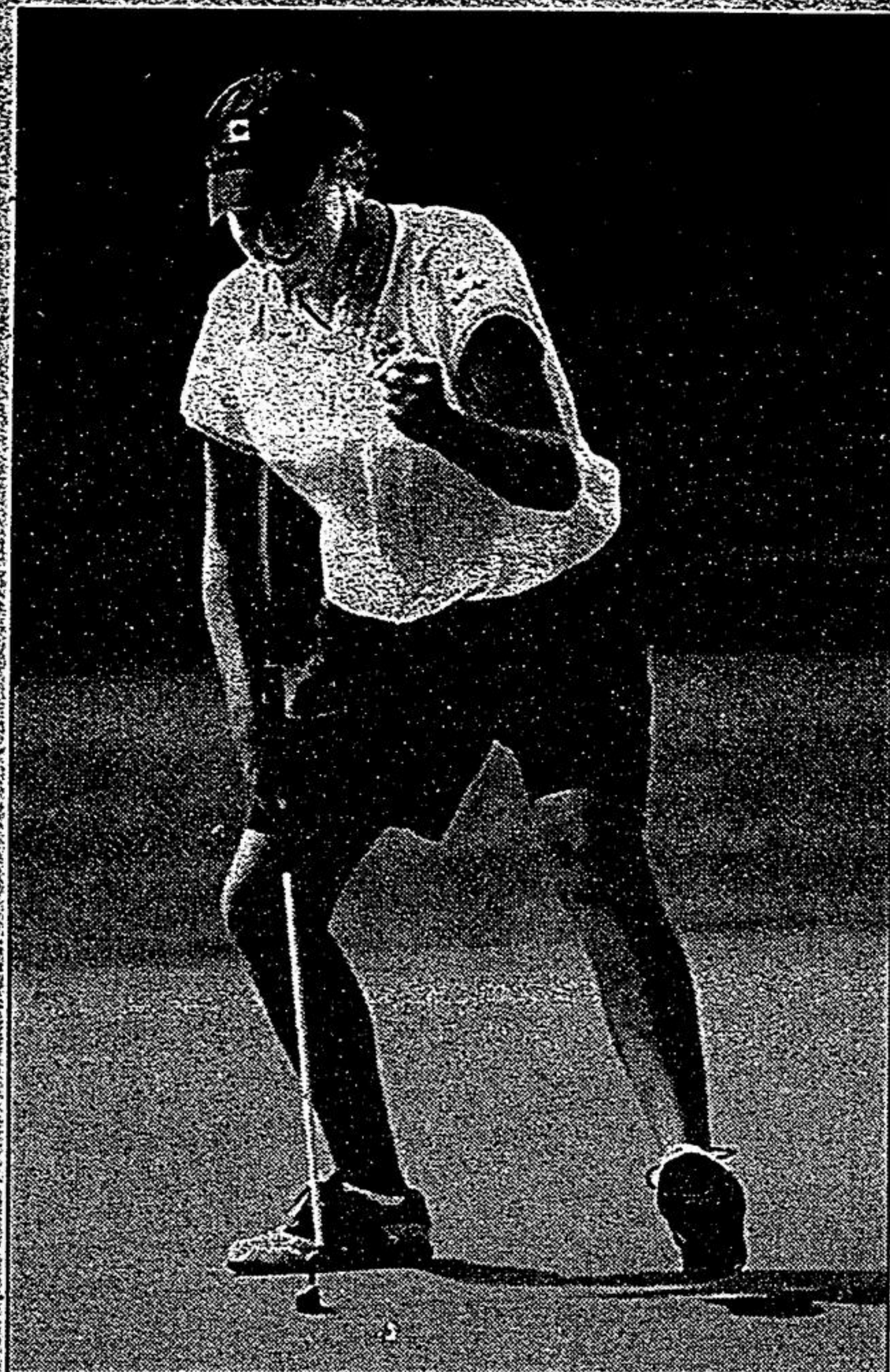
"It's also a game that requires a lot of patience. You can go back and forth, maybe 15 to 20 minutes a game without a team scoring. When you get a point it's a big deal. We know how each other plays and thinks and when we know each other's weakness, we try to cover them up."

"And you also have to deal with the elements like the sun or wind. It's a draining game."

He also insists height is no factor in the beach game as the top players in this version might be 6-foot-5 at the most.

"If you're 6-foot-9 you can make any indoor team. They can't teach height. Or if you're tall and not that good they can hide you in the back court. It comes down being able to excel in one thing in the indoor game."

"I'm only 6-foot-3 and indoors I'd be just another player. But I knew I had a good all-round game, which is important in the beach game."



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

A DEFINING MOMENT

Jessica Shepley, 16, sinks a putt and ties with Tennessee's May Wood to rescue a half point for Canada in Ruth Eller Cup singles play at the York Downs Golf and Country Club on Tuesday. Shepley came from behind on the last hole to tie with the pressure putt. Canada, however, lost the cup to the Tennessee team 6-1/2 to 1-1/2 in the fourth annual two-day event.

SPORTS DIGEST

Getting into the Spirit

The Spirit of Stouffville will open its Provincial Junior A Hockey League pre-season schedule tonight with a road game against the Ajax Axemen at 7:30 p.m.

The Spirit will then take to the road for its next two preseason matches against Caledon tomorrow and Brampton on Sunday.

Lupien earns bronze

Markham Aquatic Club member Yannick Lupien was part of the Canadian men's relay team that captured a bronze medal in the 4 x 100-metre freestyle event at the Pan Pacific championships in Sydney, Australia on Sunday.

Craig Hutchison, Jake Steele and Graham Duthie joined Lupien on the team, which set a Canadian record of 3:20.73. The prior mark was 3:21.27.

Mariners off to provincials

The Markham Mariners' mosquito selects gained a berth in the upcoming provincial playdowns on Labour Day weekend after clinching first place in the York Region standings with a 4-3 victory over Newmarket on Sunday.

Finishing the regular season with a 7-1 record, the Mariners were led by Greg Edmonds, Edward Rhodes, Paul Ruffolo, Derek Mackenzie, Dipin Puri, Stefan Wadas, Braydon Wilson, Josh Marek, Ian McDonald, Brandon Chong, Warren Tayles and Billy Davidson.

Lions claw provincial bronze

The Markham Focus on Flowers-Mayfair Pools mite Lions softball team captured the bronze medal at the recent provincial championships in Stratford after suffering a 7-2 loss to Chinguacousy in the semi-finals.

Keying the Lions to its successful run was the live arm of Jenna Cairra, who struck out 79 batters in 35 innings. She also tossed a no-hitter in the club's 6-1 first-round win over Oshawa.

Caira took a perfect game into the seventh and final inning against Oshawa before a runner reached base on an error and scored on a passed ball. But Cairra picked up the no-hitter and struck out 18 batters.

Cassandra McNichol ignited the offence with three hits and three runs and Lori Myers added a pair of hits and two runs.

After absorbing a 10-0 loss to eventual tournament champion Brampton in its second game, the Lions received a seventh-inning leadoff homer from Cassandra Warne to edge Guelph 2-1.

The Lions then faced Kitchener and required one extra inning to emerge with a 7-6 win.

A two-out triple by Warne, which scored Lori Myers from second base, proved to be the big play. Cairra then struck out the side to raise her total to 17 in the game to earn the win.

The win enabled the Lions to meet Chinguacousy, with the winner to face Brampton for the gold medal.

Warne belted a fourth-inning homer in a losing effort. Also contributing to the Lions' bronze-medal run were Hailey Ioner, Sandra Rabow, Kaitlyn Storton, Hilary Stone, Jackie DeSouza, Erin Carroll, Adrienne Willoughby and Ashley Speed.



JENNA CAIRRA

Pitched a no-hitter in club's first game

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