

There's a new Spirit in evidence at the rec centre

Having finally succeeded in packing the rec centre after five years of putting on a show that often makes what goes on at the Air Canada Centre look a little limp, the Spirit of Stouffville are in need of a couple of animated cheerleaders.

It was suggested by some during the post-game celebrations following last Thursday's Provincial Junior A Hockey League opening round series-clinching win over the Aurora Tigers that, while the big crowd was appreciated, the home town faithful lacked that "let's eat 'em raw" emotion that's contributed to the renowned home ice success of the Newmarket Hurricanes through the years.

Maybe principal Spirit owner Ed Hakonson should offer a few of his nifty Choko Motorsports jackets to fans willing to stand front row centre and whip the crowd into a frenzy.

Any volunteers? Now that the Spirit have proven they've been saving it for the playoffs all season long, the rec centre is definitely the place to be for all remaining post-season dates.

The electricity generated by the team, particularly the kiddie corps of players yet to reach their 17th birthdays, was nothing short of dazzling against Aurora, a point not missed on Hakonson.

"It's the triple A guys from Richmond Hill," insisted Hakonson during the series.

He was referring to the quintet of young Turks scouted from last year's Richmond Hill AAA Stars bantams, who were finalists at last spring's Kobi Cup national finals in Arnprior.

The five include Mike Fiume and Anthony Minicucci, who tied for the lead in points during the Aurora series with six each; Sean Scully, fourth with four points; Grant Buckley, the Spirit defenceman who had two points; and Jamie Minchella, who chipped in with one point. There's also Dan Speer, who scored both goals in a 2-1 victory by his Thunder Bay team to defeat the Stars in the Kobi Cup title tilt.

When asked about the Spirit's success against the physically intimidating and more seasoned Aurora club, the Stouffville brain trust suggested their scouting has been aimed at youngsters who know what it takes to win under pressure.

"These guys have played in some pretty important games," said Spirit assistant coach Ken Burrows of the six Kobi Cup kids.

Full marks to Burrows, who has been involved in scouting with the Spirit for over three years, and the rest of the coaching staff, for sniffing out the type of kids who could move up to the Junior A level without missing a beat.

At the same time, they were adding to the mix veterans such as Michel Bond, the little dynamo from Hearst in Northern Ontario who last year set a North Superior Junior B Hockey League scoring record.

Bond led the Hearst Elans to the league title the past two seasons, and



Bruce Stapley

also helped the team to the consolation title at the showdown of the best Junior B teams in Northern Ontario and Western Canada two seasons ago.

Bond said earlier in the season he was trying to convince some of his former Hearst teammates to join him here in Stouffville.

But he suggested the snowmobiling was too good to enable them to leave the north.

He got his wish when the Spirit finally succeeded in their efforts to lure big left winger Alain Veilleux to the team just in time to score three goals and add an assist in Thursday's series-clinching win over Aurora.

The strapping 19-year-old, who was with Bond on the 1997-98 Elans, had been biding his time playing in a local men's league and working at a paper mill and at the Hearst arena after being cut from the Hull Olympiques of the Quebec Major Junior A Hockey League last fall.

"We've been trying to get him all year," said Spirit general manager Dieter Schmidt of Veilleux. "We want him for next year."

Next year can wait. Veilleux was dominant in his Spirit debut, his hulking presence and laser-fast shot taking the Tigers by surprise. With Bond winning all the faceoffs and aiming pinpoint passes to his buddy, the Tigers were left almost bewildered as the Spirit ran up the score.

And Veilleux suggested the best is yet to come.

"I'm out of shape," he confessed after the game.

Bond, whose first language is French, was delighted just to have someone to converse with in the dressing room.

"I was so happy when I heard Alain was coming," said the likeable Bond. "Alain and I grew up together. And now I've got someone to talk French with."

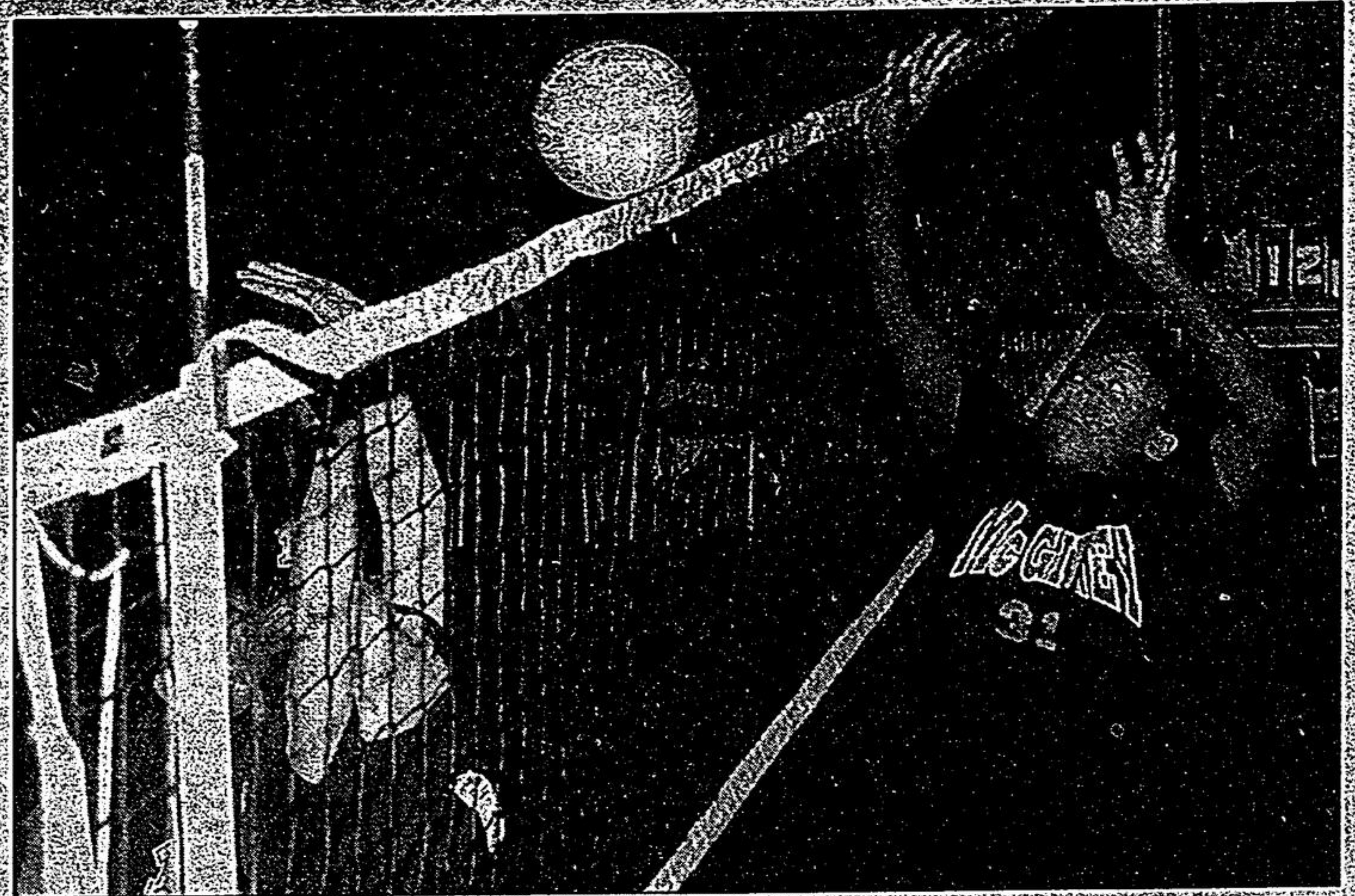
As for Veilleux, some digging finally got to the truth of the matter as to what finally led him to relent and come to Stouffville.

"My motor in my snowmobile blew last week."

Just another lucky break in a post season that is proving almost magical for the Spirit of Stouffville.

On a separate note, the Spirit are awaiting the winner of the Collingwood Blues-Huntsville Wildcats series to determine who they will meet in the second round. Should the Terriers win the series, the Spirit will face Newmarket.

If the Wildcats win the series, the Spirit would face the Couchiching Terriers.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

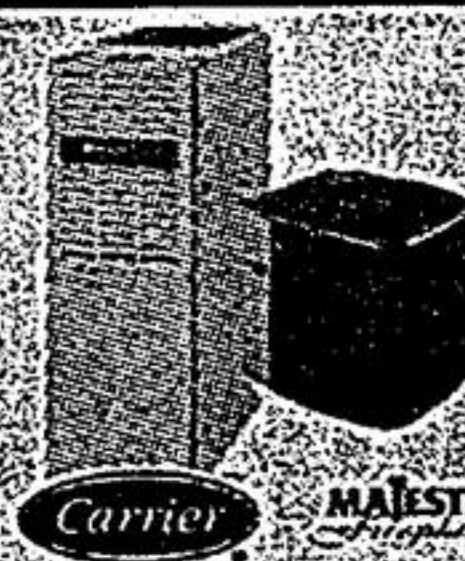
VOLLEYING BACK AND FORTH

Stouffville District Secondary School's Jessica Flemming (left), gets her arms up in the air in an attempt to block this return by Father Michael McGivney Academy's Andrea Duncan in last week's YRAA senior girls' volleyball contest at Stouffville District Secondary School. The host Spartans won the match 2-0.

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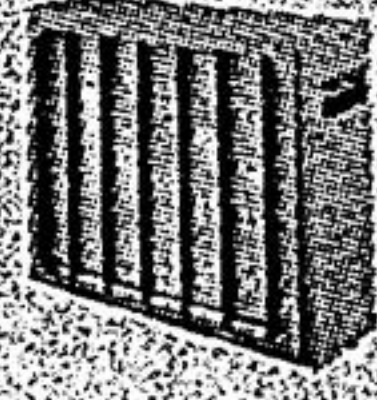
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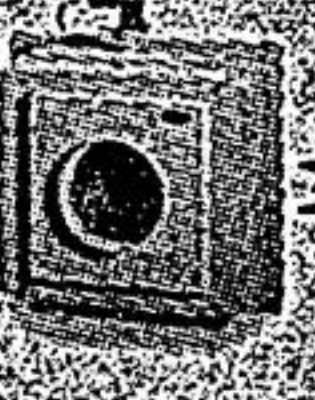
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