



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

HANGING ON FOR DEAR LIFE

Stouffville District Secondary School outside centre Mike Allen (left), tries to get a firm grip of the ball as he's about to be tackled by a Westmount Collegiate Institute player in Wednesday's YRAA senior boys rugby contest at Stouffville District Secondary School. The host Spartans won the game 17-12 to improve their record to 2-0. Shane Timms, Mike James and Mark Burholder each had one try. James Bay added a convert.

Jorgenson tackles game of rugby for Danish national team

European ancestry allows player to join team

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

When Ken Jorgenson takes to the rugby pitch this season, he will be donning two caps.

The 32-year-old Markham resident will play his ninth season with the Markham Rugby Football Club first.

The loosehead prop will also don a uniform with the Danish national team tomorrow as it prepares to face Germany in an FIRA European Plate championship contest.

Becoming the first Markham club member to earn an international cap, Jorgenson won a berth on the Danish team after contacting that country's rugby union about a year ago to see if his ancestry would enable him to be eligible to play.

"In international rugby, most countries allow players that have immediate family two generations removed," Jorgenson explained.

"My grandfather came to Canada from Denmark."

The Danish Rugby Union got back to Jorgenson about 2-1/2 months ago to inform him he could indeed play for them.

Just recently, Jorgenson ventured

overseas to join his new teammates for a week of training and a couple of exhibition games, including one against a Welsh district select side that was a developmental squad for the national team.

Although the Danish team lost the contest 20-17, Jorgenson enjoyed the experience of playing with his new teammates.

"Things went pretty well. The guys are pretty generous and helpful. They made me feel welcome," he said.

"I learned a few words of Danish. But rugby's rugby. Once you play the game it's played the same around the world."

In comparing the calibre of rugby played by the Danish team to what he's accustomed to in Markham, Jorgenson said it's similar to what's played at the provincial level.

"Soccer is the big sport in Denmark. Where rugby is played in certain areas of Denmark it's played well. The game over there is a step up from ORU ball (Ontario Rugby Union)," he said.

In addition to playing against Germany on Sunday, Jorgenson noted the Danish team will have a crucial game against Russia.

The two games, he said, are a qualifier for the Danish team to try and eventually gain a berth in the 2003

World Cup.

"The Danish team has to win one of these next two games," Jorgenson pointed out. "If they can do up they get to stay up in their division for the European Cup. If they lose both games, they'll drop down in division."

Should Jorgenson impress the Danish coaches in the upcoming European championships, he said there's a good chance he might make a return trip overseas to play a second season of international ball.

"If I do well, they'll keep me on. If we win one of the two games they could call me back for the European Cup qualifying in 2001."

Once these games are over though, Jorgenson, a lawn care manager by trade, will return to Markham to continue his season with the firsts. As well, he's also taking some time to help coach the Markham junior team.

"I'm helping out wherever I can," Jorgenson said of his involvement in the local rugby scene. "It's like a part-time job. But it's one that I like."

Partaking in the game of rugby for close to 17 years, Jorgenson feels the opportunity to play for Denmark is one of the highlights in his playing career.

"It feels good. I'm proud of my heritage and I felt proud to play in an international game."

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