

It was a 'Spirited' year of sports in Stouffville

Junior hockey run, Acton's new job, May's suspension, Streit's induction were big local sports news in the year 2000

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

Michael Tucciarone (left) and Jesse Johnston celebrated the Stouffville Spirit's biggest win ever — a second round playoff upset of the Newmarket Hurricanes in March at the Rec Complex. Both players are back with the Spirit, which is tied with Newmarket for first place in the North Conference of the Provincial Junior A Hockey League.

It was the year of the Spirit — and more.

The year 2000 saw Whitchurch-Stouffville athletes and sports figures make their mark at the provincial, national and international levels.

Local individuals distinguished themselves in arenas both hockey and equestrian, as well as on softball diamonds, judo mats and auto racing tracks.

After four seasons as also rans, the Stouffville Spirit made their first big Provincial Junior A Hockey League breakthrough.

The club swept the Aurora Tigers four straight in the opening round of the playoffs in February before advancing to the North Conference finals with a gritty six-game victory over their perennial rivals, the Newmarket Hurricanes.

The Spirit, which had never won a playoff game prior to the 1999-2000 season, were finally stopped in four games by the Couchiching Terriers.

The Spirit picked up where they left off when the 2000-2001 season got under way, holding down first place in the conference for most of the fall.

Spirit ownership as Ed Hakonson, who had rescued the franchise from early extinction in 1995, sold his interest in the club to Zeev Werek of Goodwood and Richmond Hill resident Larry Goldberg. Werek and Goldberg had been brought in as partners with Hakonson the previous season.

MAY DAYS IN THE NHL

For Brad May, 2000 brought with it a mixed bag.

The one time Stouffville/Markham minor hockey star signed a three-year contract with the Phoenix Coyotes during the off season after 2 1/2 seasons with the Vancouver Canucks.

But the 29-year-old veteran would be slapped with the fourth-longest suspension in NHL history when he inadvertently clipped the face of Columbus Blue Jacket forward Steve Heinze with his stick in November.

ACTON BECOMES A LEAF

Also in hockey, Stouffville native son Keith Acton came home when he was hired as assistant coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The 42-year-old had spent the previous two seasons in the same post with the New York Rangers. The former National Hockey League all star, who played 15 seasons with Montreal, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Washington and the New York Islanders, was assistant/associate coach with the Philadelphia Flyers the previous four seasons.

The Maple Leafs' posting enabled Acton and his family to move back into their Stouffville home on a year-round basis.

GIRLS' HOCKEY SETS MARK

The Stouffville/Markham Girls

Hockey Association won an unprecedented three Ontario Women's Hockey Association titles in the 1999-2000 season, with the atom BB, pee wee A and midget A Stars all prevailing.

Local teams also won two golds, a silver and two bronze medals in North Metro League playoff finals.

DIANNE WAS BEST SPORT

Long-time S.M.G.H.A. president Dianne White was named Whitchurch-Stouffville Sports Personality of the Year by the Stouffville Sun for her ongoing efforts on behalf of the organization.

White was instrumental in bringing the Japanese National Women's Hockey Team to Stouffville to set up training camp prior to the World Women's Hockey Championships in Mississauga in April.

PEARCE WAS AN OLYMPIAN

It was off to Sydney, Australia for Ballantrae area equestrian John Pearce.

The 40-year-old finally realized his dream of competing as part of the Canadian Show Jumping Team at the 2000 Summer Olympics.

Pearce and his mount, Jamco's Vagabond, helped the Canadian team to a ninth-place showing. Former Olympic equestrian Tom Gayford of Stouffville was on the selection committee that picked the Canadian show jumping team.

JUDO KIDS WERE GOLDEN

Stouffville's Kerry Lynne Hulshof, Kyle Chee-a-tow and Meaghan Fulton won gold medals, while fellow Sheffield Judo Club member Jennie Jones took a silver and Seiji Ishiguro a bronze at the Junior and Juvenile Canadian Judo Championships

in Alberta in March.

STREIT ENTERS THE HALL

It was another big year for Canadian female amateur golf legend Marlene Streit.

The Stouffville area resident was one of 26 people inducted into the new Ontario Golf Hall of Fame located at Uxbridge's Wooden Sticks Golf Club in October. Streit has won 10 Canadian Amateur championships through her long and distinguished career. She is the only person to win the Canadian, British, Australian and U.S. Amateur titles.

Streit served as an advisor to the Canadian team at the second annual Nation's Cup, which saw five top ranked American women golfers prevail over their Canadian opponents at Stouffville's Emerald Hills Golf Club.



MARLENE STREIT: Golf legend was named to the sport's Ontario hall of fame at Wooden Sticks.

MACRI WAS RIGHT ON TRACK

On the auto-racing track, 18-year-old Gormley resident Jonathan Macri captured the Canadian Formula Ford 1600 Championship Series crown.

Macri won four of the eight races in the season series, including a split second victory at the Molson Indy 1600 Open Wheel event in Toronto in July. Macri had been named 1999 Rookie of the Year in the Formula Ford circuit.

Goodwood area resident Peter Gibbons raced to his second straight CASCAR Super Series National title.

SOFTBALL BOYS THIRD IN CANADA

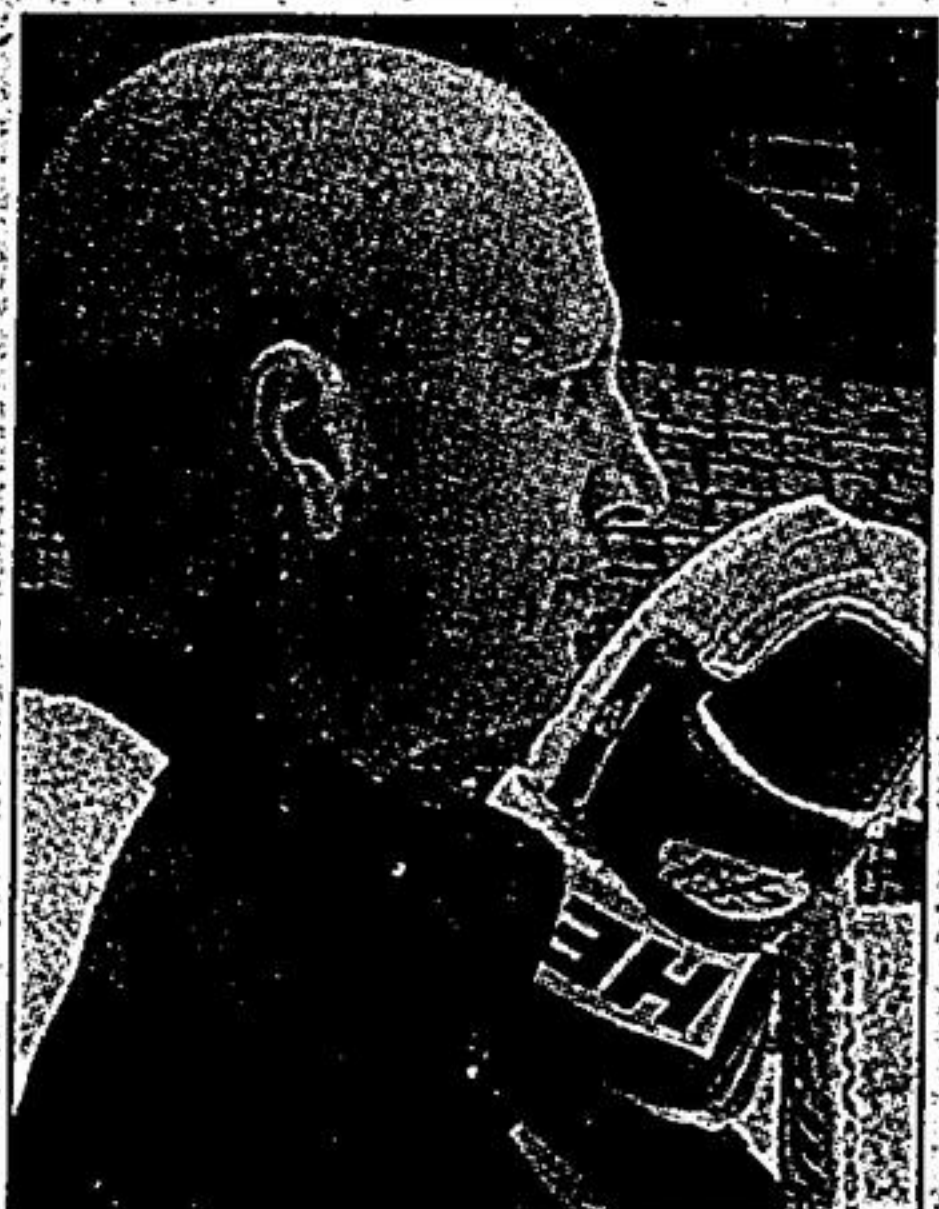
On the diamond, the Jones Pools bantam boys fastball team finished second at the Ontario Amateur Softball Association finals held in Stouffville, then brought home the bronze at the National Championships in Scarborough in August.

Forty-five-year-old Stouffville runner Kim Kavluk finished in the top four per cent at the 2000 Boston Marathon. His time of 2:52.29 was his best ever in seven Boston Marathons, leaving him 584th out of 18,500 entrants.

SCHOOL SPORTS SHUT DOWN

The biggest news was no news on the Stouffville District Secondary School sports scene this fall as teachers opted to shut down the athletic program due to increasing demands on their time.

The SDSS sports program that has traditionally played such a vital role at the school had been sporadic at best in recent years since the provincial government and the York District School Board insisted teachers spend more time in the classroom. That, along with the requirements of the newly introduced curriculum, led to the teachers pulling the plug on all extra curriculum activities.



KEITH ACTON: Stouffville native is now an assistant coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Michel Bond, who led the team in scoring in 1999-2000, continued to shine this season, being named the North Conference Ontario Hockey Association Source For Sports Player of the Month for November.

Spirit defenceman and Stouffville area resident Grant Buckley, who was drafted by the Mississauga IceDogs of the Ontario Hockey League in June 1999, signed on with the major junior Ontario Hockey League team for the 2000-2001 season.

The year also saw a change in