

Kids 'love' Tony Roman tournament

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

No league titles are at stake. But for aspiring players toiling in the Markham, Unionville and Thornhill house league circuits, their participation in the upcoming 29th annual Tony Roman Memorial Hockey Tournament is probably the next best thing to vying for a season-ending championship.



This year's event, which begins today and concludes Jan. 21 at various local arenas, will see over 2,500 players representing the Markham Minor Hockey Association, Unionville Minor Hockey Association and Thornhill Community Hockey League take to the ice in the quest to win their respective division titles in what's proclaimed as the world's largest house league competition.

Kathleen Wells, a second-year coach with the Unionville Minor Hockey Association novices, notes her youthful

charges are eagerly anticipating the start to the tournament.

"The kids absolutely love it," she cited. "It's the only opportunity for them to play in a tournament. For the kids who don't play select hockey it's the only tournament they have access to. Our league only has four teams so they get excited to play teams from other areas."

With three of his sons being tournament participants and as a coach for teams in the tournament, Joe Bowen added the annual event is one which allows players to have fun while experiencing a degree of competitiveness.

"It's a lot of fun, especially for the younger kids who are playing for the fun of it and for the older kids, they might be playing against kids they know from school," cited the long-time voice of the Toronto Maple Leafs and a Markham resident.

"(The tournament) is an excellent midwinter break for the kids and it's a fun event," added Paul Greene, Unionville Minor Hockey Association vice-president. "It gives the kids some variety."

With some games being staged at the Thornhill Community Centre and Centennial Arena in Markham, facilities with decent-sized stands, Greene notes the tournament enables youngsters the thrill of exhibiting their skills on bigger-sized ice surfaces and possibly before packed stands.

"Many of the kids don't get the opportunity to play in larger-sized rinks and this tournament will let them do it," he noted from past experiences.

"Our games are usually held at 7 a.m. on Sundays and this tournament gives us a chance to play at more reasonable times," cited Wells. "By playing in the afternoons we should have more people in the stands. The players' grandparents and other relatives might be in attendance."

Originally called the Mayor's Cup tournament, the Tony Roman Tournament was renamed after the former mayor of Markham, who wanted to give young hockey players in house leagues throughout the town the opportunity to play in a tournament of their own every year.

Atoms skate home with silver from Ottawa

SPORTS DIGEST

The Markham-Stouffville Stars atom As skated home with the silver medal from the second annual Ottawa tournament last weekend after dropping a 2-0 decision to Aurora in the final.

The Stars reached the final after posting victories over Nepean 3-1, Whitby 2-0 and Ottawa 2-0.

Scoring for the Stars were Hayley Hughes with three goals, Mackenzie Manning with two goals and one assist, Bailey Gummey, two goals, Jairne Sparks and Corliss Bean, one assist. Cassandra McNichol allowed just three goals in four games and recorded two shutouts. Also contributing to the club's effort were Samantha Ruinsky, Deanna Parry, Karis Mcrae, Bethany Holeschek, Robyn Laing, Julie Ingratta, Danielle Littlejohn and Natalie Geiger.

Weiss earns high marks

If the current rankings from the National Hockey League's Central Scouting Bureau hold up prior to the annual draft, Stephen Weiss will be a high selection.

In Wednesday's latest ratings of North American skaters eligible for the 2001 NHL entry draft, the 17-year-old Markham native was rated as the sec-

ond-best player.

A second-year centreman with the Plymouth Whalers of the Ontario Hockey League, the six-foot, 175-pound Weiss was ranked only behind Jason Spezza, a centreman with the Windsor Spitfires of the OHL.

The ratings, however, did not include players from Europe.



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