

## Stouffville Tribune

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# OPINION

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Frank Daggett

## Children shouldn't have to suffer for parents' childishness

**R**ink rage. Where there are organized sports, you are virtually guaranteed some level of rink rage, whether it be at the hockey arena, the soccer field or the ball diamond.

Ask any referee and he will tell you about parents who spoil children's sports with their verbal abuse of coaches, referees and other players.

Displays of hostile behaviour at sports events have never been worse than last summer near Boston, during a minor hockey practice.

After verbally attacking the organizer, a father was asked to leave. Following practice, he returned and beat the organizer unconscious while four children, including two of the victim's own children, witnessed the horrifying scene.

The victim later died and the father was charged with manslaughter.

In York Region, there are referees who have been the targets not only of verbal abuse, but physical abuse as well.

As a result of some of these incidents, fences will be erected between the crowd and the playing field at soccer games in Aurora.

There are several reasons why rink rage has worsened. Psychologists and sports authorities say society, as a whole, is to blame.

"We are seeing an erosion of civility in society as a whole," said Fred Engh, president of the Florida-based National Alliance for Youth Sports, "and sports just mirrors what is happening all around us."

That's a far cry from what I remember growing up playing minor sports.

I played hockey at the house league level for most of my minor league career, but I can't remember any fits of rage at any time. Sure, there was politics, but it never spilled out into a riot.

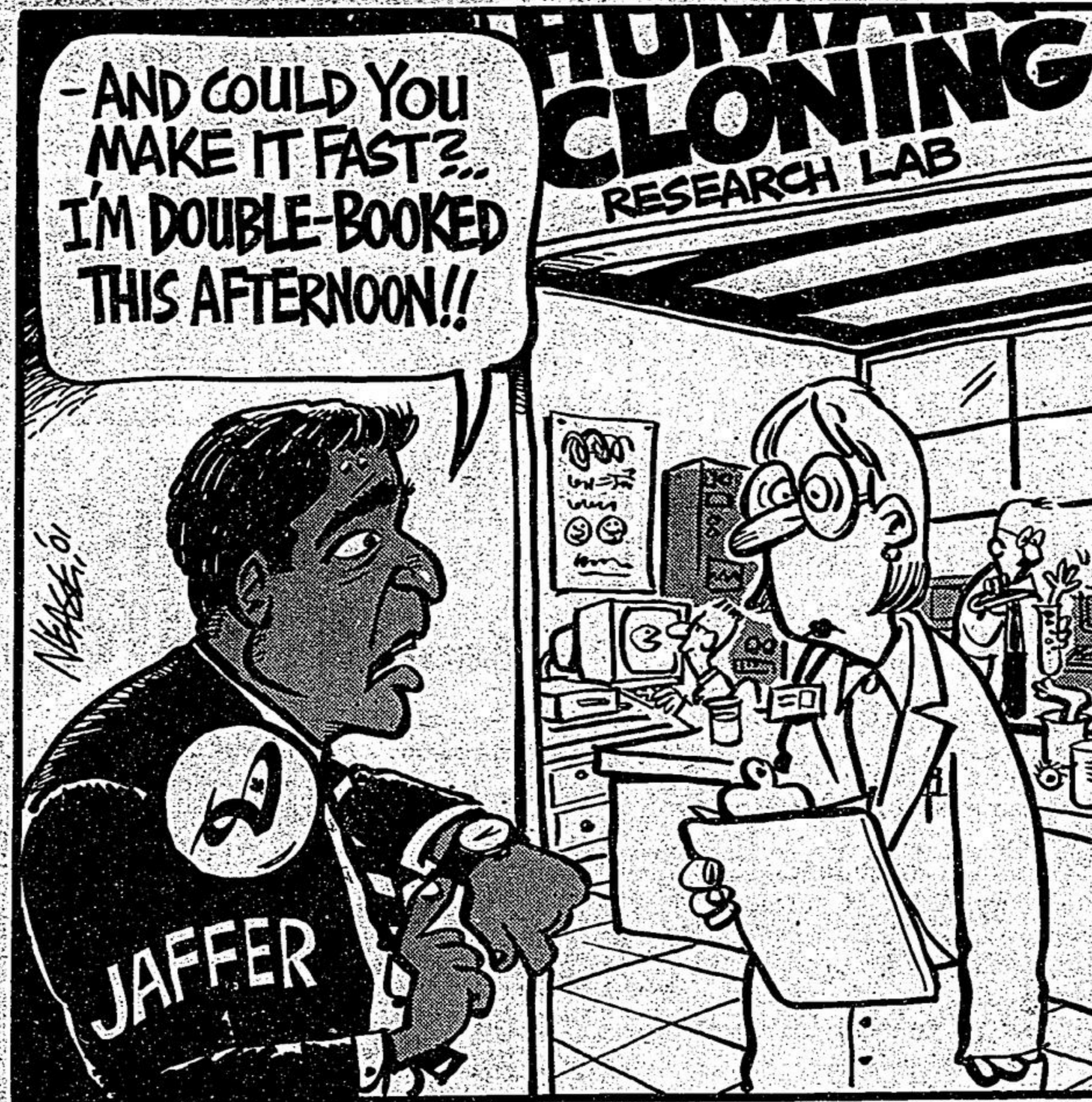
However, when I played junior B hockey, I noticed a difference. With the increase in competitiveness on the ice came an increase in competitiveness off the ice.

Fortunately, my parents never pressured me to participate in hockey or any other sport, which is why, when I didn't enjoy playing anymore, I could walk away. But not everyone has that opportunity.

Professional sports has become a multi-billion-dollar empire, where below-average players can make millions.

For parents who live vicariously through their children's accomplishments, the dream of playing pro is nothing more than a meal ticket. Their children's happiness is forgotten as parents are driven to win.

Children shouldn't have to suffer for the childishness of their parents. If adults can't behave like adults, they should take their ball and go home.



## LETTERS

### Solving environmental problems means looking at the big picture

It seems every day I read some kind of environmental story in newspapers across the Greater Toronto Area.

With that in mind, I wonder when we will start to look at the entire picture instead of just our own backyard?

Here are a few issues as examples: we have a new trunk sewer going up the Ninth Line in Markham; the York Region water pipeline is proposed to run from Lake Ontario through Pickering and the heart of the Duffin-Rouge agriculture preserve in Markham up to the Oak Ridges Moraine in Whitchurch-Stouffville; and of course, the eastern extension of Hwy. 407, which was exempted from a full federal environmental assessment.

If you all add all these up, they guarantee uncontrolled sprawl.

As the public outcry increases over the loss of farmland and green space, the province is selling off land holdings to developers. That takes more farms out of production and more farmers out of business.

All this is happening at a time when international food supplies are being cut because of livestock disease.

This is a wake-up call to us, that we need to protect local food supplies. We must also begin to practice serious conservation of green spaces and protection of our waterways to ensure we don't have another Walkerton.

We all need to encourage our politicians to ensure intelligent regional planning is in place instead of municipality by municipality, to ensure our sprawl doesn't implode and leave us with an unaffordable, unhealthy style of life.

**BERNADETTE MANNING**  
Markham

### Birds are one reason for the spread of foot-and-mouth disease

While every precaution has been taken to prevent further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe, the main cause for the spread — which has never been mentioned by any reports in the national or local media — cannot be prevented and that is birds.

In Europe, many birds fly from one country to another and even over the English Channel, which is only 20 miles wide at the narrowest point.

The virus is carried on the feet of the birds, which have fed in the fields of infected herds. In spite of the precautions taken, how is it possible that parts of Ireland have reported cases of foot-and-mouth disease?

The obvious answer, again, is birds. In the early 1930s, when there were outbreaks on a lesser scale in France, England and Germany, it was then considered that birds played a major part in the spread.

**ADAM JOHNSTONE**  
Markham

### Unleashed dogs continue to be a problem in Milne Park

How many people must complain before the Town of Markham does something about the proliferation of unleashed dogs at Milne Park?

I have nothing against dogs in general. However, as every responsible owner knows, even the friendliest dogs can never be completely trusted around small children.

Recently, a large dog ran up from nowhere and knocked over my three-year-old son while we were walking.

It turns out the dog's owner was busy looking after two other unleashed dogs. My son loves dogs, but he was clearly frightened by the experience.

How would you feel if a giant dog knocked you down unexpectedly, then placed its toothy jaws inches away from your face?

On another occasion, I witnessed seven dog owners walking together in Milne Park, none of whom had their dogs on a leash. The bylaw signs are clearly posted throughout the park, so ignorance is not an excuse.

Milne Park is large enough that the town should consider fencing in a section where dogs can legally run free.

This, combined with regular enforcement and stiff fines for violators, should minimize the problem.

At the very least, the existing leash bylaw should be enforced.

Some would argue that such restrictions violate a dog's freedom and dogs deserve the same rights as people.

I hate to break the bad news, but dogs are not people. If the choice is between the dog's freedom and a child's safety, my vote will always be for the latter.

**GERALD BLANCHARD**  
Markham

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