

Teachers look forward to coaching sports again

BY STEFANIA RIZZI
Staff Writer

Two yellow school buses sat idle in the parking lot at Stouffville District Secondary School. In seconds, a flood of football players came charging through the school's doors to find vacant seats on the bus.

As the 65 energetic athletes sat eagerly awaiting departure, Spartans varsity football team head coach Heath Weir made sure last minute details were looked after.

"It was chaotic," said Weir, referring to the exhibition game against a Scarborough high school.

"The kids didn't know what to do with themselves after 3:30 p.m.," said the history teacher, who decided to organize a team last year despite teachers across the region refusing

to hold extra-curricular activities. "I respect what they were trying to do but they were hurting the kids."

"Extra-curricular is just as important as the academic," said Weir, who will head the school's first football team since 1972. "They build confidence on the playing field and that transfers into the classroom."

"When no sports were being offered it was frustrating. (Students) were frustrated and we were frustrated."

"I told Tony (Lewis, Stouffville's principal) I was going to make this team happen and, if it wasn't possible, I was considering leaving," he said.

But Weir won't be leaving the school and won't be the only teacher sporting a whistle in com-

ing weeks. He will be joined by countless others coaching and supervising after-school sports and clubs this year.

It's an incentive for us to do well in school...

The reduction of extra-curricular activities last year was in response to increased teacher workload and the province's now-defunct plan to make extra-curricular involvement mandatory, explained York Region Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation president Gerry Harrison.

Now that an agreement has been

reached between unions and the province, Harrison said teachers are more than excited to coach and supervise extra-curricular activities.

"What we're hearing from various (sport associations) is that, with most provincial championships last year, schools were pulling out and they were left scrambling to find a school to host the championship," he said, explaining the number of fall sports in public, Catholic and private schools has more than doubled from last year.

"This year, they're calling in to host them and this sends a clear message government should move away from mandatory extra-curricular involvement and should remain voluntary."

"The activities are there and (teachers) are willing to provide

them. It's a win-win situation."

York Catholic District School Board spokesperson Chris Cable said extra-curricular activities in Catholic high schools were relatively unaffected.

But this year, York Region Athletic Association president Colin Butler said students will have more opportunity to participate in team sports. For example, there are more than 300 sports teams in the public, Catholic and private systems, compared to 133 last year.

Politics aside, Spartans right guard Kevin Sheriff and quarterback Benito Bellissimo are happy to be involved in after-school sports.

"It's an incentive for us to do well in school because you have to maintain a certain average to be on the team," Sheriff said.

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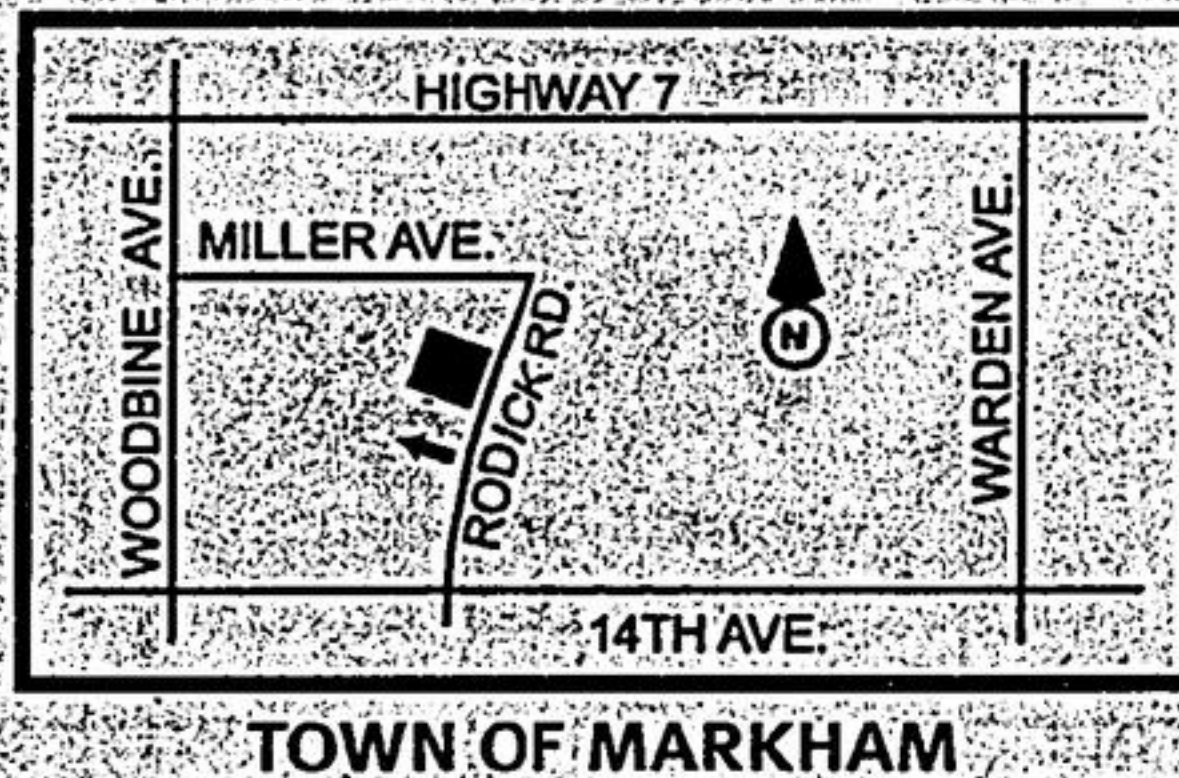
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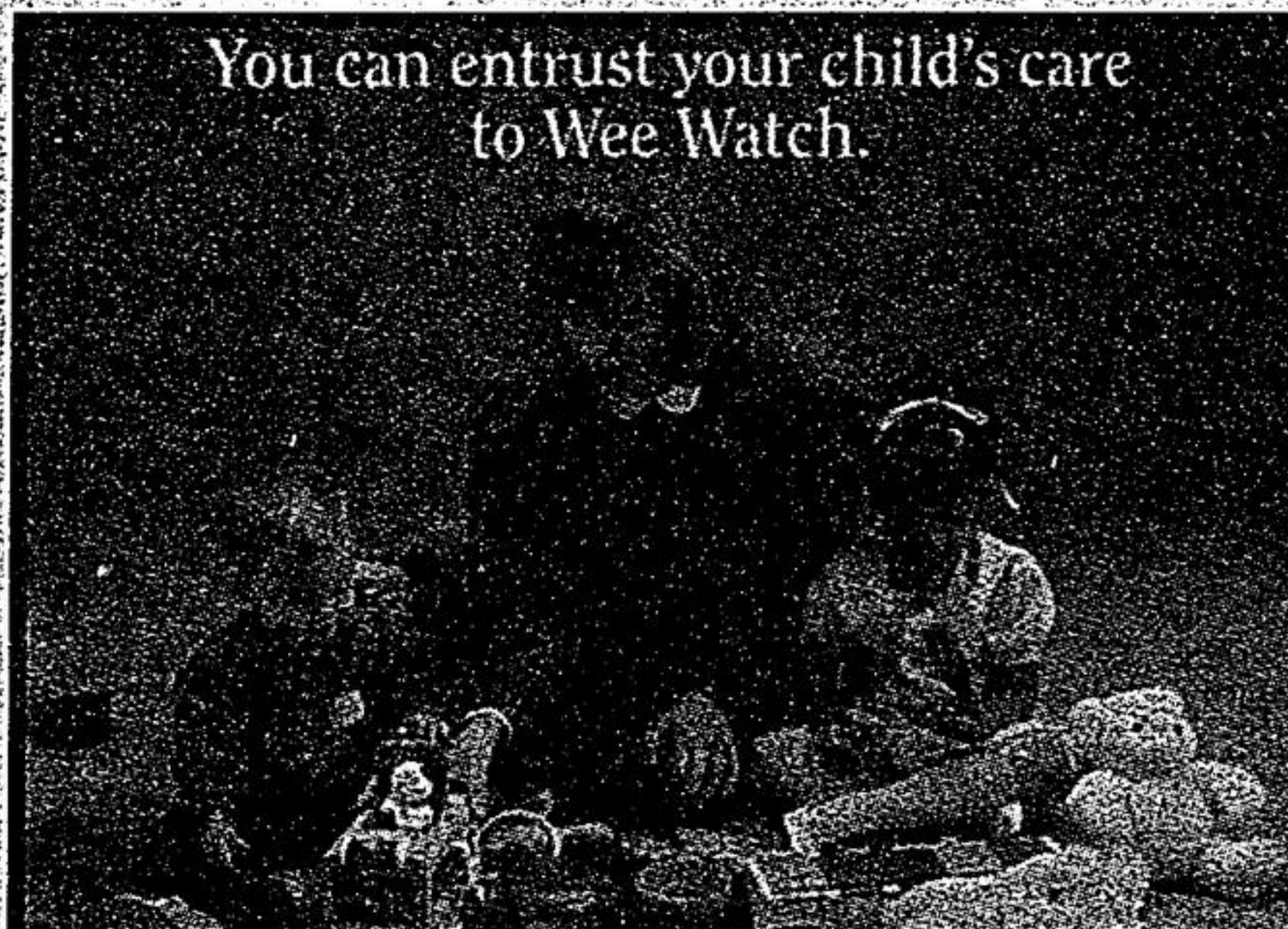
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