

Economist &amp; Sun • Stouffville Tribune

## SPORTS

## Larger rugby club kicks off season today

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA  
Sports Editor

There's a great sense of anticipation on the part of Jim Monk when the Markham Rugby Football Club kicks off its season.

This year though, the club's president feels a little more enthusiastic.

With the club fielding three senior men's teams, an expanded junior program, the possible resurrection of a women's team and long-awaited completion of its own clubhouse, Monk has good reason to feel ecstatic.

Monk noted the senior team, which begins its 14-game campaign today with the thirds facing the York Yeomen at their Austin Park field at noon, will compete in the Ontario Rugby Union's Marshall Division. This division is the highest level of competition in the province.

Where the most noticeable change will take place this season though is within the club's junior program.

Fielding under-18 and under-14 boys teams last season, the Markham club now has five teams, Monk cited. This season there's an under-18, under-16 and under-14 boys team along with an under-12 co-ed, non-contact squad and under-18 girls' team.

"We're excited with what the future holds when the kids clear through our junior program and eventually play at the senior level," said Monk.

In explaining the growth of its junior programs, Monk attributes it to several factors.

He pointed out a number of current club members have youngsters who share an interest in the sport. At the same time, the elders have found the time to coach the game's nuances to their youngsters.

Economics is another reason. "Junior dues are \$125 and this includes everything except a player's shoes and shorts. If you compare that to other sports like hockey or golf, rugby is by far less expensive for a youngster to play in."

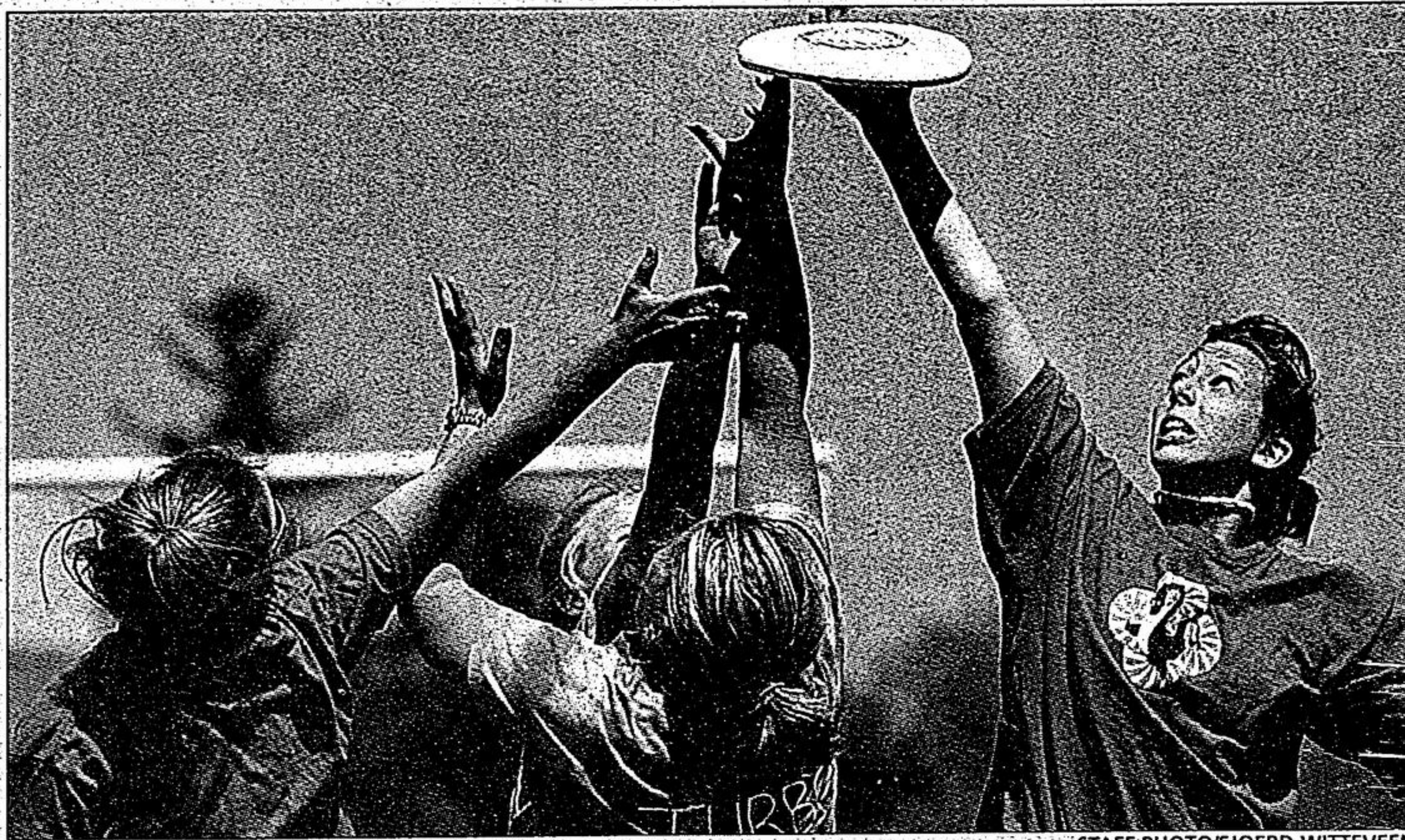
Monk also praises the enthusiasm taken by high schools in Markham and Stouffville who field rugby squads.

"Most high schools in the area are running junior, senior teams and girls' teams. For kids who are keen on playing the sport once the high school season ends, there's nowhere else for them to go and play it."

Monk noted a women's team is on the verge of reforming after taking a year's sabbatical last year due to a lack of players.

Another reason which might account for an increased enrollment at all of its playing levels is the anticipated completion of the club's new 3,200-square foot clubhouse, located on their home pitch.

"We've played in Markham now for 22 to 23 years and to have our own clubhouse is a big deal," said Monk.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

## STRETCHING IT TO THE LIMIT

Markham District High School's Danika Lawson (right), uses her long reach to grab the frisbee over two Aurora High School defenders during Wednesday's semi-final contest in the York Region Athletic Association Ultimate Frisbee Championships at Milliken Park. Markham District High School won this game 5-3 and took home the silver medal after dropping a 7-1 decision to Cardinal Carter Catholic High School in the title tilt. The Markham District High School and Cardinal Carter teams will go to Ottawa on May 30 and 31 to compete in the OFSAA festival.

## Kitchener makes Minicucci an offer he can't refuse

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA  
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Two years ago, no one in the Ontario Hockey League would even give Anthony Minicucci a look.

"Too small," an OHL scout said of Minicucci, who wasn't included on the draft eligible list at the 2000 OHL draft in Mississauga. "He can't play in this league."

Now, apparently, he can.

This spring, the Stouffville Spirit captain signed a guaranteed contract with the OHL's Kitchener Rangers.

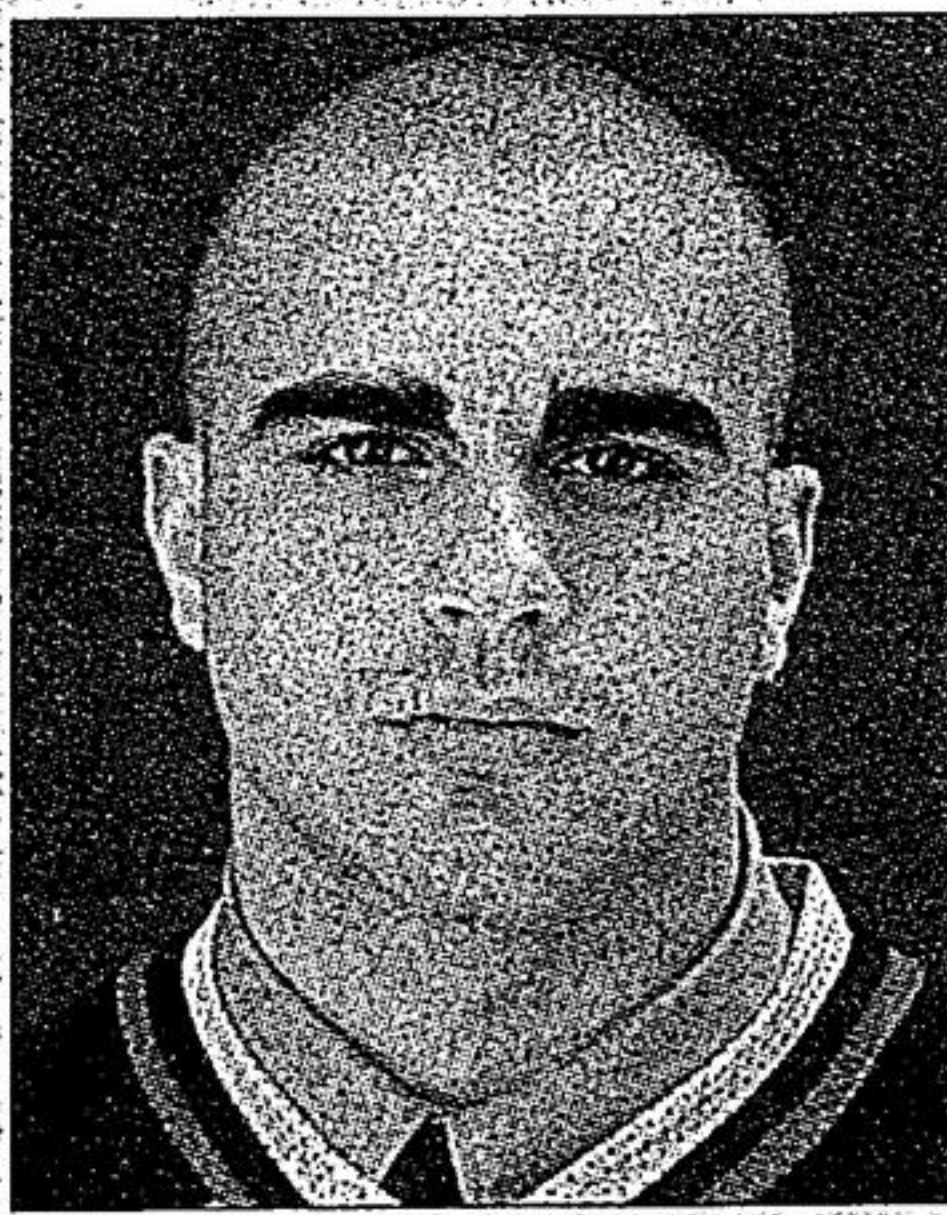
Steve Spott, Rangers' associate coach, said: "Getting Anthony is like hitting a home run."

The Rangers signed him to a two-year contact — the duration of his junior eligibility which includes the upcoming year and an overage season the following year — that will pay for his post-secondary education.

"We're looking forward to have him come in here and put some numbers here that he did in Stouffville," said Spott of Minicucci. "He was a dominant player at that (tier 2 junior) level and once he gets his feet wet at this level and gets confident, we feel he can be a good player."

Big numbers?

Minicucci broke a ton of team records during his three years in Stouffville. This season, the Maple resident won the scoring



**ANTHONY MINICUCCI:** Undrafted Spirit captain was MVP and scoring champion in North Conference.

race — 82 points in 45 games — in the Provincial Junior A Hockey League's North Conference and was named conference MVP.

"We know that he could have gone to a big-time college in the U.S. but he wants to be a pro and he feels this (going to the OHL) route could be better for him," said Spott.

Spott said the Rangers had been keeping a close watch on Minicucci since Christmas.

"We kept in touch with Brian (Perrin, Spirit head coach) and I know Brian from the under-17 days working regional camps with him. Brian's a first-class guy to deal with. Stouffville had Anthony's best interests in mind."

At 155 pounds, Minicucci

may have been too small for the OHL when he was first draft eligible three years ago. But time in the weight room had him at a buff 190 last season.

Several NCAA schools came courting, but Minicucci wasn't interested.

"Every since I was a little kid, I've always wanted to play in the OHL," said Minicucci. "This is my chance."

Other OHL teams expressed interest before, but none as seriously as Kitchener.

"They were great," said Minicucci of the Rangers. "They said they had been keeping an eye on me all year, but waited until the end of the season to make the offer."

"It was a great three years in Stouffville. Brian Perrin and others in Stouffville really helped me a lot."

Perrin feels Minicucci can thrive in the OHL.

"Anthony is the most competitive athlete I have coached."

"He always likes the underdog role and loves to prove people wrong. To show just how competitive he is, I point to the fact that I witnessed him score three times when we were down two men killing penalties. No matter the situation he was always a threat to make something happen on the ice. He has truly earned his way to play at a higher level and I think he has a great opportunity to play even at a higher level."

## SPORTS DIGEST

## Yeung cards second CJGA title in Hamilton

Humphrey Yeung, 12, fired a two-round total of 156 to capture the boys' 12 and under division in last weekend's Canadian Junior Golf Association's Team Canada qualifier Junior Worlds at the King's Forest Golf Course in Hamilton.

Winning his second CJGA title of the season by two strokes over Jordan Lesansky of LaSalle, Ont., the Markham resident carded a five-over-par 77 on the first day and a 79 on the second day.

Among other local results, Pierce Cassidy, 13, of Unionville was second in the boys' 13-14 group after carding a score of 167 (80, 87). He was two strokes behind Steve Lee of North York.

In the intermediate group, Sal Spadaro, 20, of Markham finished fifth overall after firing a 174 (87, 87).

Ryan Franke, 16, of Unionville was 22nd in the boys' 15-17 group with 182 (93, 89).

Fifteen-year-old Jason Deschamps of Markham finished 23rd overall after firing a 184 (97, 87).

## Izaryk earns all-star honours

Aaron Izaryk earned two awards when the America East Conference announced its post-season baseball awards on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old Markham resident, who is in his freshman year at the University of Maine, was named to the all-rookie team as catcher and designated hitter.

The Markville Secondary School graduate was also named to the America East's All-Conference first team as a designated hitter after leading the conference with a .472 batting average.

Including non-conference games, Izaryk sported a .384 batting average and drove in 18 runs.

## Stouffville Storm wins opener

The Stouffville Storm squirts opened their fastball season on a positive note Thursday with a 9-7 win over the Oshawa Stingers at Memorial Park.

Tyler Heffernan drove in the game-tying run in the bottom of the seventh and Nolan Benoit, the eventual game-winning run. Derek Eickmeier and Erick Espiritu-Santo split pitching duties. Brian Hector and Alex Mangotich handled catching duties.

The Storm is hosting an eight-team tournament, which began yesterday and concludes today at the Stouffville Memorial Park diamonds. The final is slated for 3 p.m.



**AARON IZARYK**  
Earns honours as a catcher and designated hitter.