

# Big guy puts the fun back into youth sports

He's my kind of coach.

Standing mid-infield, his six-foot, 235-pound frame towering over a team of attentive 10 year olds, he looks every part the intimidating Punjab from an Orphan Annie comic strip.

But appearances are sometimes deceiving. For Stouffville's Joe Palmer has but one goal in mind — to put the fun back in softball.



Jim Thomas

"Fun's the name of the game," says this mite house league coach, "not hits, runs and errors."

This theory, which he weekly puts into practice, is obviously working. For win or lose, his boys leave the park with their faces wreathed in smiles.

To first-time spectators, Palmer's approach to the sport may seem strange. At season's start, he talks not to the players but to their parents.

"I tell them the way it is. If they don't like it, they can leave," he says. The conduct of some spectators disgusts him. And some coaches too.

"A kid should never be ridiculed in public," he says, "there's a time and a place and it isn't during or even after a game."

The same goes for treatment of umpires. "Sure, I'll speak to an official if I think he's erred, but I'll never chew him out. I do it quietly. An umpire, like a player is only trying to do his best."

Palmer, 41, is a native of East York, moving from Scarborough to Stouffville six years ago.

A son, Warren, 7, is a member of his team. A second son, Kevin, 7, plays five-pitch advance.

Palmer knows what game-playing is all about. During his salad years, he participated in every sport in the book.

What he learned as a boy, he imparts to his

team.

"I played for fun," he recalls, "and this is how it should be."

Part of the problem, he says, too many parents see their sons as future pros and expect them to play this way. Either that or a dad wants his son to attain a skill level he never had.

"I've seen kids leave the park in tears," he notes, "this shouldn't be."

And it won't be that way if

Palmer has his way.

Palmer recalled one incident where a parent went "absolutely bananas" over what was perceived as a bad call.

Even before the umpire could respond, he stepped in and calmed the father down.

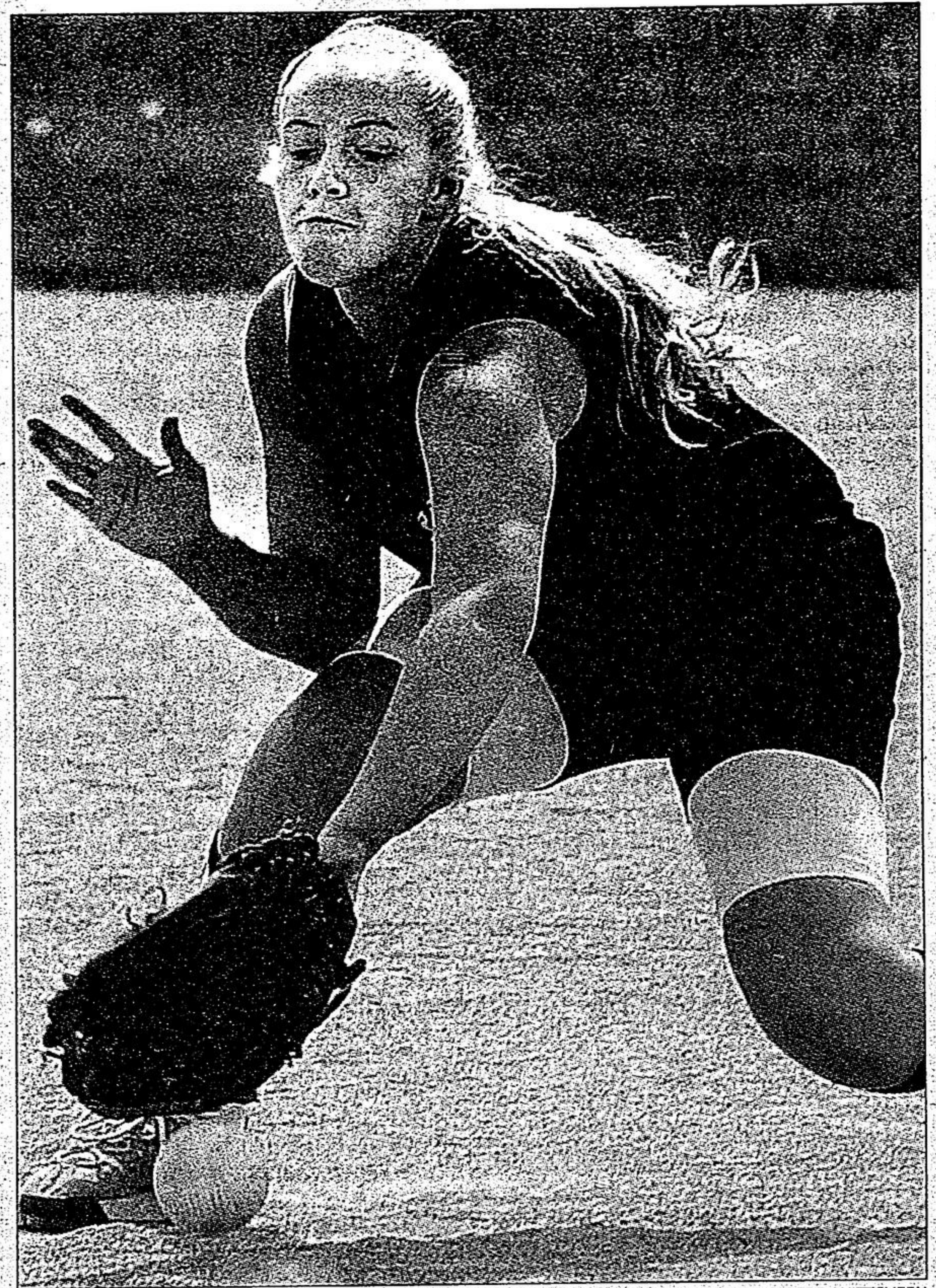
"This isn't a game where there's a pro contract waiting in the wings. When the kid comes home, the dog will still lick his face and he'll go to school the next morning. Nothing's changed."

Palmer uses, what he describes as "the clothes peg treatment," when setting out his lineup. As the start of each game, a peg, representing a player, is moved one notch down. This means the lead-off batter will be first to the plate two or three times a season. And every boy plays every game, not always the same positions.

Palmer's main concern is not with players but with parents of players. He believes a coach should be equally involved in what's going on off the field as on. And not just in softball but in other sports as well.

"Improper conduct by parents is not negotiable," says Palmer, "I make this point early and it seems to work."

Putting fun back in softball is Palmer's motto. He hopes it's contagious.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

## THE BALL STOPS HERE

Stouffville District Secondary School Spartan's infielder Jessica Carnrite makes a stab at corraling this ground ball that was hit by an Aurora High School batter during Monday's YRAA girls' softball quarter-final contest at Memorial Park. Carnrite's throw to first retired the batter. But the Spartans saw their season come to an end when they suffered a 4-3 loss.

## Outdoor pool set to open — for at least one more year

BY JIM THOMAS  
Correspondent

Although Whitchurch-Stouffville's Lebovic Leisure Centre remains the focus of attention, the 40-year-old outdoor pool is alive, aquatic supervisor Nicole Ongman said recently.

Opening day for the outdoor pool (located, along with Lebovic in Memorial Park) is June 22, weather permitting. The summer schedule concludes Aug. 25.

The outdoor facility will operate weekends only from June 22 to July 1.

The hours are 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.; 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

From July 2 to Aug. 25, its 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., weekdays; 6:30 to 8 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday; 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on weekends.

"Some people actually prefer swimming outside," Ongman said, "while others are detrimentally effected by the sun. The flexibility, (indoor and outdoor pools), is nice. We like to keep everyone happy."

Ongman admits she has no idea how long this two-pool arrangement will last.

"This will be a town council decision," she says.

Ongman explains she and aquatic programmer, Carol Bain, will oversee both sites along with assistance from hired supervisors.



MICOLE ONGMAN: Says the outdoor pool still serves a purpose and is a viable option during the summer months.

As to the outdoor pool's condition, Ongman says they'll know better when fill-up begins early this month.

With the Lebovic pool in full operation, Ongman is encouraged with the reception it's received from residents.

During one recent week, 1,629 individuals clicked through the turnstiles; 1,500 during another prior week. It's not unusual to have three and four birthday parties on a weekend.

"Birthday parties have taken off like crazy," she notes.

## SDSS coach's camps teaches youngsters the fundamentals

### SPORTS DIGEST

Youngsters seeking to improve their basketball or volleyball skills can do so during the summer months as instructional camps for these sports will be conducted at Stouffville District Secondary School in July and August.

Jim Fletcher, long-time teacher and coach of the SDSS senior boys' volleyball and basketball teams, will stage his annual Fletch's Fundamental Basketball and Volleyball Clinics.

A series of five weekly basketball clinics will be held starting from the week of July 8-12 for boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 11.

Another co-ed camp will be held for youths between the ages of 11 and 15 from July 15 to 19.

During the week of July 22, a boys' camp for those between the ages of 11 to 14 will be held.

The following week, a girls' camp for those between the ages of 12 to 15 will be held.

The final clinic is for boys between the ages of 14 to 17 during the week of Aug. 12.

Camp hours are from 9 a.m. until noon.

Cost is \$100 per camper.

During each camp, youngsters will learn basic basketball rules and skills.

As well, there will be games and foul shooting contests.

For those interested in volleyball, a co-ed camp will be held for youngsters between the ages of 8 to 15 from Aug. 6 to 9.

Enrollment is limited for this camp, which will run from 9 a.m. until noon.

Cost is \$90 per camper.

For further information, Fletcher can be reached at (905) 985-1542 or by e-mail at: Fletches@idirect.com. SDSS is off Ninth Line north of Main Street.

### Mother Nature foils Team 3 in Quebec

Mother Nature didn't do the the Stouffville-based Team 3 Red racing team any favors when it took to its Snap-on Tools/Canadian Forces Monte Carlo to the track at St. Eustache, Quebec for the CASCAR Auro Pro/Napa 150 race last Saturday.

With Billy Rowse Jr. qualifying in the 24th starting position for Saturday's feature, the Uxbridge resident drove his vehicle to a 20th-place finish that was called on lap 97 of the 150-lap event due to rain.

"It is too bad the rain came when it did. The car was starting to work well on the new rubber we put on the right rear and we could have been a top 15 car tonight. It is just too bad," said Rowse Jr. as the team packed up the hauler in the rain.

The Team heads to its first-of-three road course events of the season on June 15 and 16 for the Clarington 250 at Mosport International Raceway near Oshawa.

This event will be the first time that the Team will run two teams under the Team 3 Red umbrella.

Rowse Jr. will be campaigning the Snap-on Tools/Canadian Forces Team 3 Red #3 and will be joined by teammate Chris Fowler in his Canadian Forces/Snap-on Tools Team 3 Red #30.

Both drivers have had success at the road course events in the past and are looking forward to the event.