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# SPORTS

PLENTY OF OUTDOOR SPORTS CAN BE BROUGHT INDOORS FOR WINTER

## Don't hibernate, recreate

BY JEROME WATT  
Staff Writer

Just because summer is over, it's not the end of your favourite outdoor sport — just bring it indoors.

From baseball and soccer to rock climbing and tennis, athletes can bring many sports indoors, allowing them to continue enjoying the action and hone their skills.

Risa Healey, co-ordinator of partnership programs for the Town of Richmond Hill, said the demand for indoor sports has grown.

"It's really boomed in the last couple of years," she said. "There's more programs available to people."

In Richmond Hill, children between three and eight years of age can learn the basics of tennis in the TenTen program. The town and the Canadian Sports Academy have joined together to offer the program.

"It's a new program," Brian Panovka, head of the program, said. "It teaches the fundamentals of tennis."

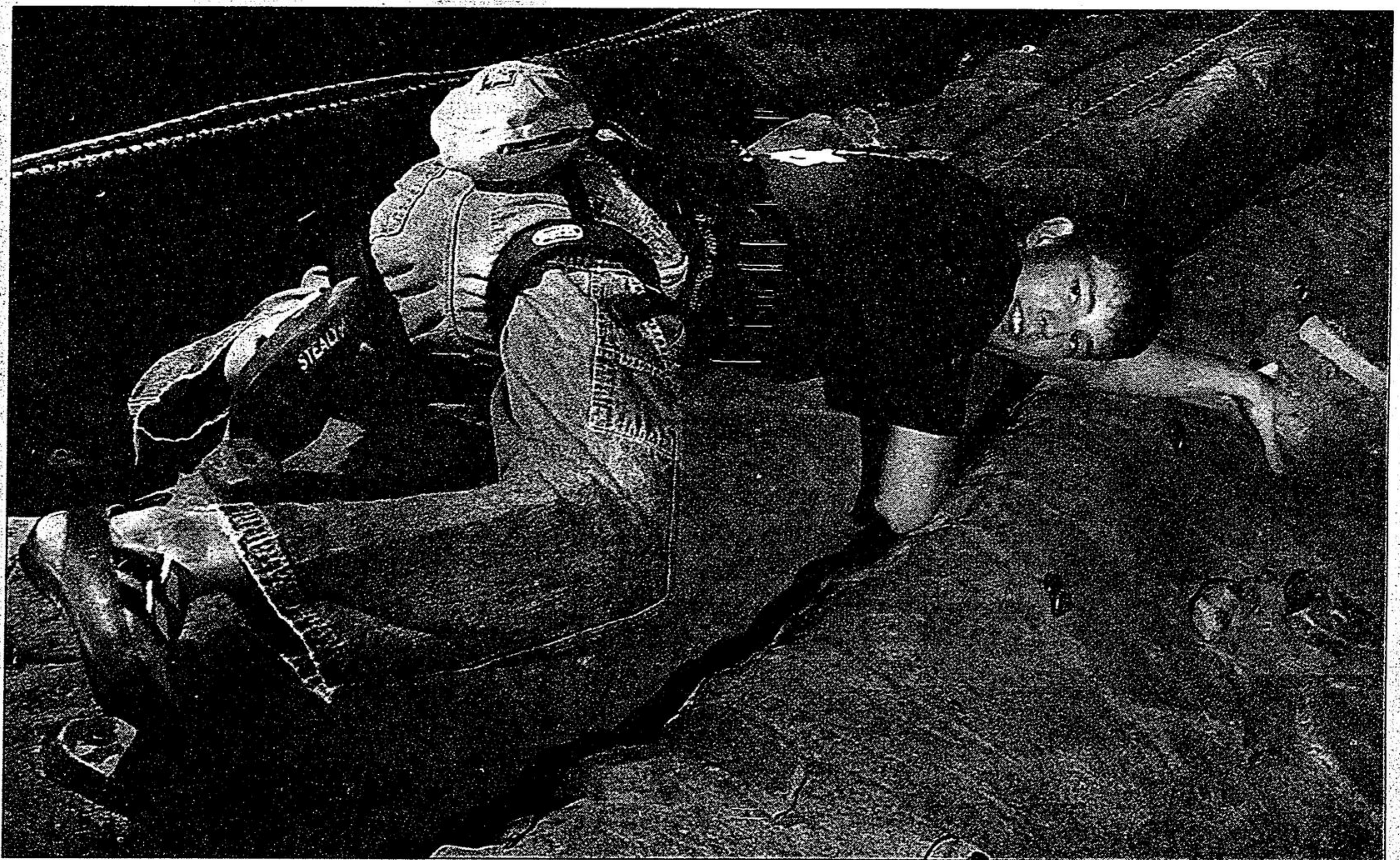
When young children try to learn tennis on an outdoor court, it's too big, he said, so his program offers them the chance to master skills on a smaller court. He uses a special ball and has equipment that can be set up in any gym.

For adults, there are plenty of indoor facilities in York Region in which to play tennis.

Sheila Epton, vice-president of house league for the Newmarket Minor Softball Association, introduces tykes to the game of baseball over the winter through Blastball.

Blastball uses a tee and a base that emits a loud honk when players step on it. The game is useful for teaching children between three and seven the basics of baseball. The small space needed for Blastball allows it to be played in a gymnasium.

"With Blastball, it uses muscles and ligaments that are not used during the winter," Ms Epton said. "It basically keeps them toned for the summer. Then they are ready for their first year of baseball."



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Allister Johnstone enjoys indoor rock climbing at Rock and Chalk in Newmarket. Bringing the sport indoors helps novice climbers learn and enables those more experienced to practise and perfect their techniques.

Winter activities such as skating and hockey don't work the muscles needed for baseball, Ms Epton said.

Ms Epton said kids too old for Blastball need to keep in shape over the winter, too. Pitchers and catchers should begin indoor training in October, while the other players should join in January.

Ms Epton makes use of a net and "mush balls" to practise batting during the winter. Her players also make use of indoor batting cages.

"I'm keeping their hand-eye coordination up," she said.

Ms Epton said if pitchers don't keep muscles limber over the win-

ter, they'll injure themselves when they take to the field in summer. Winter training also keeps an athlete's skills up.

Winter training has become more prevalent in baseball over the past couple of years, Ms Epton said.

"Coaches are becoming better educated," she said. "We've opened ourselves to different (training methods)."

Rock climbers looking to perfect their techniques and get a good workout during the colder months can climb indoors.

"A good majority of our climbers are outdoor climbers,"

Bruce Wilkinson, owner of Rock and Chalk in Newmarket, said. "A lot of them come in and get on the wall just to strengthen their body."

With the shorter daylight hours in the fall, it gets too dark for climbers to scale the cliffs after work. Mr. Wilkinson said being able to go to the gym allows them to climb when it's dark outside.

Climbers are also able to recreate problems they face outside in the gym and practise perfecting their technique before tackling a real rock face.

In some cases, it's safer to learn to climb in the gym.

"Outside, you've got the unknown," Mr. Wilkinson said.

A small percentage of climbers only climb indoors and it's not uncommon for people to come in and climb recreationally, he said.

Indoor soccer has become a sport in itself. "It basically keeps (players) in touch with the game over the winter months," Sam Foti, general manager of the Richmond Hill Soccer Club, said. "It started out as that. Now it's grown into leagues. Indoor leagues thrive as much as outdoor (leagues)."

The Richmond Hill Soccer Club has both an indoor soccer house

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