

# Stouffville Amateur Hockey League still going strong

BY JIM THOMAS  
Correspondent

There were those who said it wouldn't last.

That was 25 years ago. Despite dire predictions, the Stouffville Amateur Hockey League's still going strong.

Initiated by Eric Scaife and Steve Upton in 1977, the founding fathers discovered they had an organization but no home. Ice time at the old arena on Park Drive was already booked.

Not to be discouraged, they found a place to play at Centre Ice Arena in North York.

"Once the word got out, the phones never stopped ringing," recalls Mr. Upton, "interest was amazing."

The league, which had two hours of ice time every Sunday, began with four teams and 60 players.

But the executive wasn't

happy.

Mr. Scaife and Mr. Upton insisted a Stouffville league should play locally and took their plea and a marketing plan to council. The welcome mat came out for the 1978 season and league expanded from four teams to eight.

Today, the SAHL includes four divisions, 10 teams of 20-year-olds and up; 10 teams of 35-year-olds and up; six senior teams and four women's teams.

Games are played Wednesday nights; Sunday mornings and nights. The total roster now exceeds 450 players. The league even has its own website with player statistics available.

Twenty-five years has taken its toll though, as only a few of the originals remain.

The league is now headed by Scott Dunsmoor. The vice-president is Art VanEsterick; treasurer, Bruce



SCOTT DUNSMOOR: SAHL president says emphasis is placed on players having fun.

Gibbon and executive, Brent Stachel and Dan McEachen. There are also division and goaltender reps.

While a lot has changed, the same rigid rules envisioned by Mr. Scaife and Mr. Upton remain. Physical contact and slapshots are prohibited. A major penalty car-

ries an automatic suspension with the length determined by the executive.

The majority, says Mr. Dunsmoor, is interested in the fun aspect of the sport and while there's still a will to win, this is secondary.

"The last thing we need is to baby-sit 50 year-old guys," Mr. Dunsmoor insists.

To maintain a competitive balance, players are ranked according to skills. Several are experienced Jr. A and Jr. B performers. Bill Root, once a defenceman with the Toronto Maple Leafs, is a league member.

At 64, Frank Jago is the league's elder statesman.

As an indication of the league's popularity, the 20 and 30 age plus divisions have a waiting list. There's still room for more in the senior and women's groups.

What makes the league so special, says Mr.

Dunsmoor, is the fact 95 per cent of all players reside in Whitchurch-Stouffville. Those who move away are still eligible to play.

As more men and women

look to hockey as forms of recreation and fellowship, and as the town continues to grow, Mr. Dunsmoor predicts the sport will keep pace — through the next 25 years.



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## Local Rock star to show his Spirit tonight

A member of the National Lacrosse League champion Toronto Rock will hold court at tonight's Stouffville Spirit game.

Stouffville resident Glenn Clark will be on hand for "Rock Night With the Spirit." He'll sign Rock pictures between the first and second periods.

The Spirit hosts the Couchiching Terriers in a junior A hockey game



beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena.

Draws will be made throughout the game for Rock paraphernalia including tickets to

the team's home opener, Jan. 11 at the Air Canada Centre.

In the last four years, the Rock has attracted more than 16,000 fans per game to the Air Canada Centre, while winning three of the last four league championships (1999, 2000, 2002).

The 13-10-1-0 Spirit is in third place in the North Conference of the Provincial Junior A Hockey League, four points up on Couchiching.

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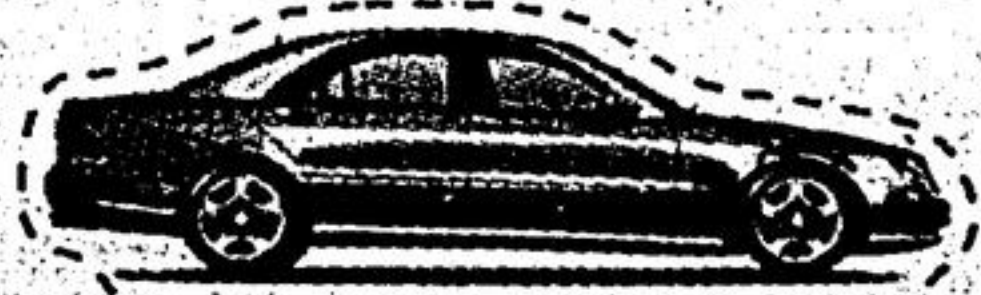
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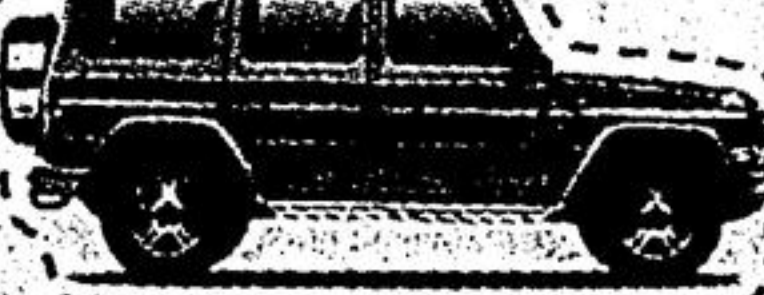
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