

# Some vintage Grapes' whine was just fine

**Y**ou think Don Cherry was in Stouffville Sunday just to have a little fun? Help out a friend? Tell a few stories in the dressing room?

Think again, naive ones.

That was close to vintage Grapes on the bench of the NHL oldtimers/celebrities team at the local rink. Not quite the classic model from the late '70s with the Boston Bruins.

He wanted to win Sunday, and depending upon who you talk to his team either lost or tied the Stouffville Spirit junior A squad.

Just win, baby. With about five minutes to go in the game and the ice rental about to run out, a game official — that would be me — decided to let the clock run without stops.

"Stop the clock," former New York Islander Pat Flatley, yelled in my direction.

"We're coming back," came another voice from their bench. They were, down only 7-5 now.

"Yah, stop the clock," said Grapes, picking up on theme and leaning in my direction in the penalty box.

For the love of Bobby Orr, you'd have thought I'd taken a two-hander to No. 4's knees or kidnapped Blue the dog.

How do you argue with maybe the most famous person in Canada? The timekeepers resumed stopping the clock. The ex-pros tied the score.

Everyone went home happy, including Grapes.

It's hard to tell who the 1,200-plus who filled the rink were there to see. Grapes and his Hockey Night in Canada buddy Ron MacLean?

Or was it the host, Stouffville's own Keith Acton? Diagnosed with cancer a year ago, the assistant coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs has recovered. He wanted to



**JIM MASON  
OFF THE TOP**

put on a little game for the Canadian Cancer Society. Raise some money, some awareness and a little community spirit. At least I think that's how he put to me when he asked for a little help with the event last fall.

As Keith told the crowd Sunday, the game that would become a huge success almost didn't happen. The Spirit was willing but there roadblocks were hit in recruiting ex-pros to take on the Spirit. The word cancelled came up.

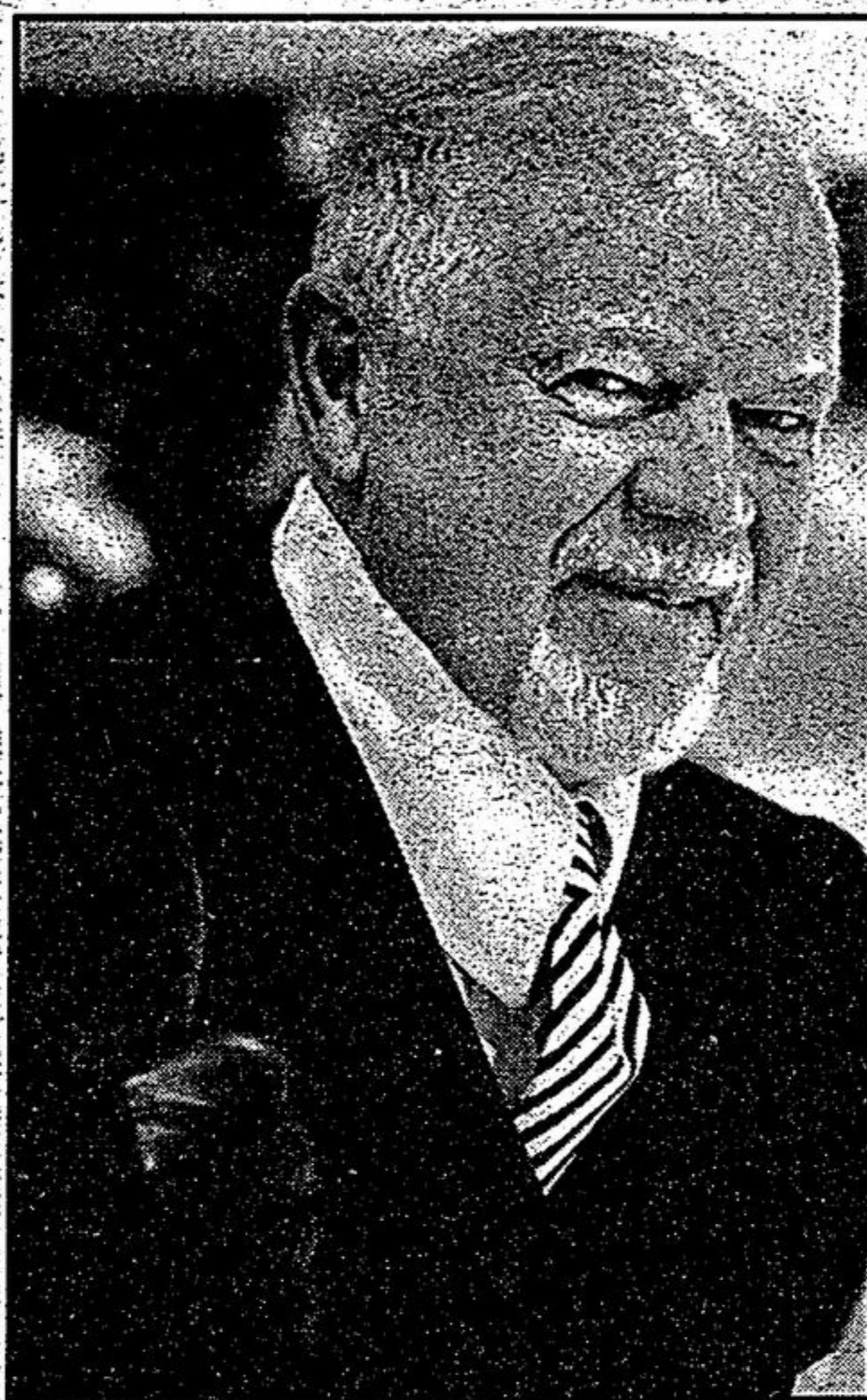
Ron MacLean, who has attended golf tournaments in Stouffville hosted by Keith and Mayor Wayne Emmeson, was asked. Don Cherry was in the room at the ACC that night, too.

Both said yes. The only sticky point was getting back to Toronto from the Leafs-Canadiens game the night before. Two games who can demand large coin on the public appearance circuit didn't ask for a dime. Organizers had a limo booked to pick the pair up at Pearson Sunday and deliver them to Stouffville.

"Don't bother," said Grapes.

So impressed was Keith, that \$5,000 of the proceeds — estimated at more than \$20,000 — was donated to Rose Cherry's Home, well after Don agreed to coach in Stouffville.

There was Grapes after the game, standing just off the ice in a sea of autograph



**DON CHERRY: On the bench for The Game of Our Lives at the Stouffville Arena Sunday.**

BILL ROBERTS PHOTO

seekers and their writing instruments.

"Just let me know when you want out of here," Stouffville's Mike Humphreys, doubling as Grapes' body guard said.

"I'm fine," said Grapes, laughing and signing.

He's right and he is fine. Vintage Grapes.

*Jim Mason is managing editor of the Stouffville Sun and was one of the organizers of The Game of our Lives.*

## STOUFFVILLE SAYS

BY SARAH FASULLO

*"What are your thoughts on a possible war with Iraq?"*



**TOM KENNEDY**

"Although I don't want to see a war, there is a strong possibility it will come to that. There may be a major loss of life. President Bush is doing a great job and we should help the U.S."



**ELIZABETH TSOUKALIS**

"There is the possibility of a war and it seems that we are not taking enough interest in it. It does not seem to have enough importance for us. The consequences will be too great if we don't take the proper precautions."



**KATELYN SMITH**

"It seems like nothing has changed here for us, but I am worried because there is the threat of war. If things progress, there could be World War III."



**KATHRYN WEBBER**

"It's sad in this day and age that we still resort to war in conflict and we can't think of a better solution."



**TINA ROBERGE**

"You never want to see people to war, but if it is going to make the world a better place, then you have to do what you have to do."

# Nothing could match The Game of our Lives

**O**ver the years, Stouffville has witnessed many sports spectacles, in every season, at various sites.

Including hockey, softball, soccer and golf, winter, spring, summer and fall.

However, for sheer enjoyment, absolute skill and unparalleled results, nothing could match the on-ice achievement of Sunday.

The Game of our Lives, featuring ex-NHLers and celebrities against the Jr. A Stouffville Spirit, had fans ohing and awing, cheering and applauding like at no other event. This town may never see its equal.

Picture, if you will, hockey personalities like Don Cherry, Ron MacLean, Pat Quinn, Ken Dryden and Joe Bowen, all gathered together for one game under one roof and one quickly realizes why this contest was to become the hottest ticket in town.

Add to this, hometown heroes like Keith Acton, Doug Todd, Doug and Mike Feasby, Bill Hassard and Danny Larmer, together for one game, on one team and you have a hockey homecoming made in heaven.

And more — competition provided by a spirited squad of fast-skating Jr. A puck-jugglers, eager to prove their prowess, and one has a ring-side seat to an event like nothing staged here before. And all for a good cause — the Canadian Cancer Society.

More than 1,200 people, described by referee Ron Hoggarth, "as the finest fans in Canada", jam-packed the Stouffville Arena, filling every nook and cranny of the place. Even these weren't your ordinary Stouffville spectators. They came to cheer. They came to laugh. They came to give — to one of the truly great charities in this land.

More than \$19,000 was raised.

It was a scene of contrasts, from pin-drop



**JIM THOMAS  
ROAMING AROUND**

silence during Jennifer Thunem's beautiful rendition of our national anthem to a standing ovation for organizer Keith Acton, Stouffville's own, from reverential quiet while the aforementioned told of being stricken with cancer to tumultuous applause for Coach's Corner duo Cherry and MacLean.

Yes, there was a hockey game. And, for the record, the Spirit won 9-8. But the scoreboard tale was secondary. What mattered most was the end result in money raised. What matters most is a hoped for end to the worst scourge our country's ever known.

Keith told it like it is. How, one year ago, he'd been diagnosed with cancer. He vividly recalled receiving a phone message from Roger Neilson, his former coach at Peterborough. "Welcome to the team," Neilson said.

"But that wasn't the team for which I'd signed," Keith stated. Then he added: "God made that decision for me. It's been the best darn team on which I've ever played — a team comprising the most caring, the most dedicated, the most loving players one could ever know. A team where everyone's a winner."

Every fan weighed on every word.

"This is hockey," said Don Cherry, "this is spirit. Because of people like you, this is the best country in the world."

On a lighter side, Cherry made this not-so-subtle observation about Joe Bowen: "As a goaltender, you're a great announcer!"

Referee Ron Hoggarth carried a portable mike instead of a whistle. And used it at every opportunity, mostly in the face of netminder Bowen. Hoggarth was assisted by ex-Stouffvillite Sean McQuigge.

At the game's conclusion, Cherry, MacLean and Acton were besieged by autograph-seekers, many of them young players who'd come to see their heroes. Each generously complied.

Acton admitted later he was "lost for words" in describing Stouffville's endorsement of his fundraising project. "This is the generous side of humanity," he said.

Acton praised the organizational efforts of Stouffville Sun and Tribune editor Jim Mason, a director with the Spirit team. "With all he did, I don't know how he found time for his regular job," he said. The funds, he explained, would be used "to arm and equip experts to provide new technical cancer treatment and care."

These words were echoed by Katherine Craine, manager of the Markham Whitchurch-Stouffville unit of the cancer society. "It's due to caring individuals like yourselves that the Canadian Cancer Society is the No. 1 contributor of funds for research. You should be proud of your community's caring spirit."

Indeed we are. Proud of our community and its caring spirit. Our star and our hockey stars, past and present, never shone more brightly than Sunday afternoon.

*Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.*