

AT THE SCHOOLS

Jokes, kindness take teacher to top of student ranks

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

For the record, Rob Harper's exact age is not up for discussion. "Are you going to put my age in there?" he asks.

"The kids don't know how old I am and it has been kind of a running thing since I came here."

We are free, however, to tell you this: Mr. Harper, a youthful-looking Grade 7-8 teacher at Whitchurch Highlands Public School in Stouffville, is the York Region Newspaper Group's March Teacher of the Month.

Mr. Harper is one of those teachers you will always remember, even when you move on in life," wrote Kirsty Card, 13, in her nominating letter.

"He's kind, funny, but can also be very strict and demands respect."

By coincidence, those are some of the same words Mr. Harper uses to describe Mr. Seibel, one of his own teachers from his North Bay high school days.

"It was a history class and he made learning fun," he said. "He always made us laugh and we always enjoyed going to his class."

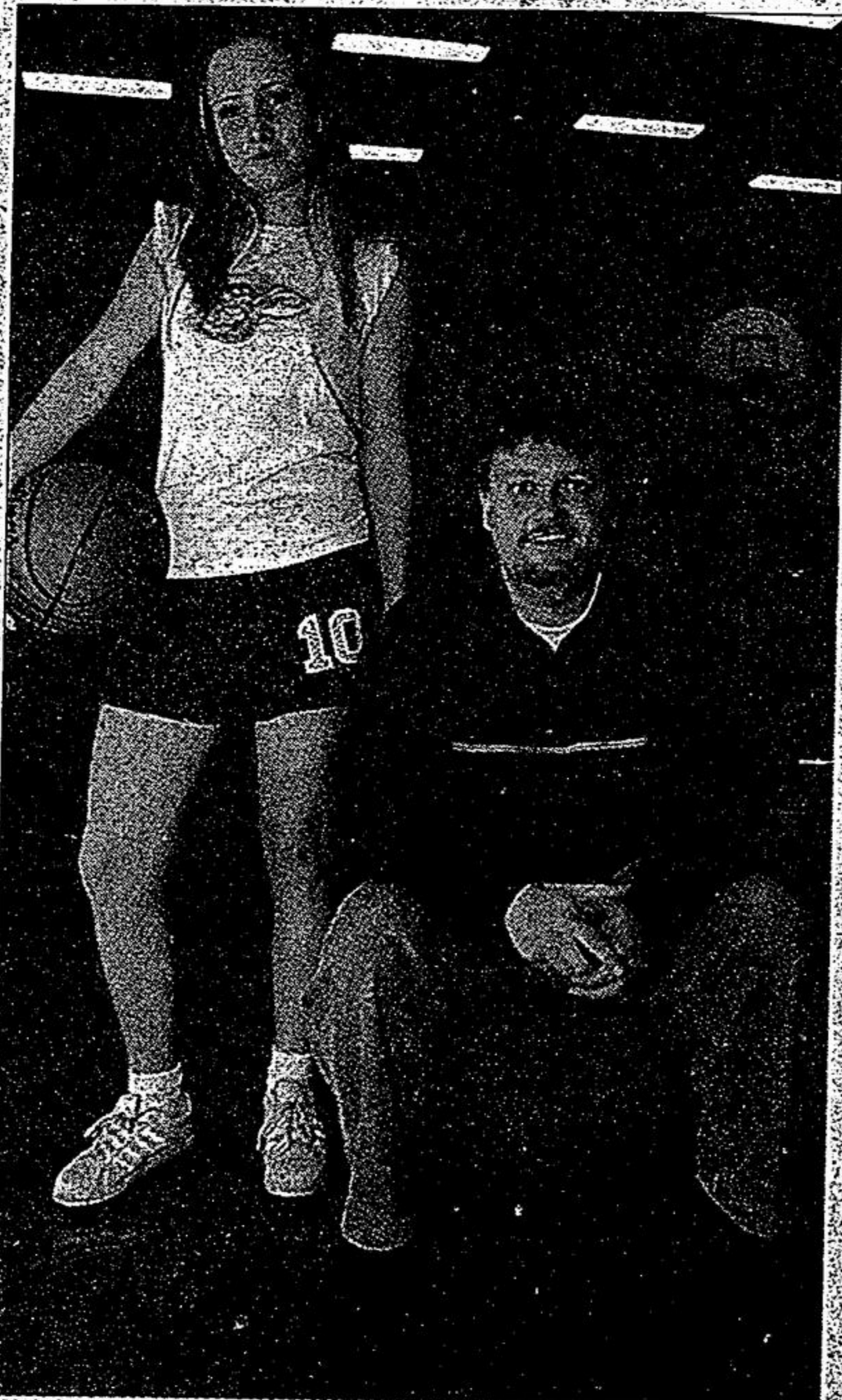
A quick scan of Mr. Harper's own classroom shows he took those lessons to heart.

There's a stack of joke books and Calvin & Hobbes books on his filing cabinet and Kirsty says he's "a bit of a joker in class," a trait she credits with keeping her interested in her studies and, consequently, improving her grades.

Of course, it's not all fun and games in his class. Sometimes, it's just games ... with a little fun added.

A self-professed jock, Mr. Harper proves it by running or sharing the coaching responsibilities for the school's hockey, flag football, volleyball and basketball teams.

Photos of Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and other sports stars share space with inspirational posters on his classroom walls and the wall behind his desk is covered with ribbons



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Whitchurch Highlands Public School teacher Rob Harper is the York Region Newspaper Group's Teacher of the Month for April. He was nominated by Grade 8 student Kirsty Card, 13.

For being April's Teacher of the Month, Mr. Harper receives a pizza party for his class, compliments of Pizza Pizza/Hwy. 48 and 16th Avenue in Markham, a flower arrangement, compliments of Lindy's Floral Boutique in downtown Whitchurch-Stouffville, workshop to improve communication skills by Inside Out with Karen Armstrong, soap suds pump for the classroom, compliments of Jennie Coutanche, independent kitchen consultant for The Pampered Chef and a \$25 gift certificate from It's Elementary School Supplies at Newmarket Plaza, Newmarket from owner Christine Guldemester. If you would like to join our group of sponsors, contact editor Tracy Kibble at the address below. To send in a nomination for April's teacher of the month, e-mail submissions to Ms Kibble at tkibble@yrg.com or fax them to 905-853-5379.

and clippings covering his teams' exploits, including the boys' basketball team's recent fourth-place showing at the regionals.

Looking back, school seems like a natural place for someone like Mr. Harper to end up ... not that he probably believed it back then.

"I was sort of a procrastinator," he admits, thinking of his own school days in North Bay.

While he may have been interested more in hockey and baseball than his studies, he did have teachers like Mr. Seibel to inspire him. And even then, he was developing the skills that come with being a good teacher, working as a summer camp counsellor and teaching hockey to beginners.

After graduating from Nipissing University, he spent a year or so supply teaching in his hometown. His future mother-in-law, a principal with the York Region District School Board, suggested he make the move to the area and Whitchurch Highlands is where he ended up.

Five years later, he's still having a ball and it's not hard to see why.

"I just enjoy kids and being around them, because I'm a kid at heart," he said. "They keep you young."



Courtney Yip

At the Schools Writer

Pop, pop, fizz, fizz, oh, how bad it is!

Over the past two decades, North American teenagers have taken a dangerous detour into the unfenced woodlands of soda city, while quickly leaving behind the fruitful and beneficial village of dairy.

So, quick in fact, no one has even realized the harm in this surprising transition. According to a new report in the latest issue of General Dentistry, "soft drink purchases by teens in schools increased 1,100 per cent over the past 20 years, while dairy purchases have decreased by 30 per cent."

This massive increase in the soft drink sales has made thousands of company presidents of PepsiCo and Coca-Cola rich at our health's expense.

Because of the recent decrease in milk and juice intake, there comes an increasing risk of poor health such as obesity, tooth decay and osteoporosis, major concerns for all of today's youth.

Since milk and juice intake are being left behind, so are important essential nutrients they offer such as vitamins A, D and, most crucially, calcium. These nutrients seem to be going down in the diet of modern civilization.

The high acid count in soda is damaging our teeth. Pepsi has an acid count nearly three times that of battery acid, according to Mindy Hermann, R.D., a nutritionist based in New York.

"Soda is high in calories because it's loaded with sugar. In fact, one can has about 10 teaspoons of sugar."

But don't think taking the sugar-free way out is going to help either. Diet sodas contain chemically produced ingredients that can be harmful to your system, as well.

The key element in a diet soda is aspartame, the sugar-free sweetener that gives the cola a sugary taste, along with little or no calories.

According to the Federal Dental and American Medical associations and the World Health Organization, "the substances in the diet drink have been related to behavioural problems in children (and can affect) weight gain and cause permanent brain damage."

Apparently, this is evident in large doses only, but how much soda do we drink?

According to the survey, a lot more than we think.

Ashley Liu, 16, of

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