

Lack of teams, beer cancels ball tourney

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

When the annual Strawberry Festival begins tonight in Stouffville there will be a noticeable void on the schedule.

The Buttermakers' slo-pitch tournament, which is staged at Stouffville Memorial Park as part of the festival, was cancelled Monday. The tournament pre-dates the 19-year-old festival. The Buttermakers, a competitive team founded by Mayor Wayne Emmerson, played in the now-defunct York Durham men's league.

Mark Watson, a tournament spokesperson, said the event was cancelled because the Buttermakers couldn't obtain liquor permits.

Attracting a variety of men's, women's, co-ed, competitive and recreational teams from across the province, the tournament has raised money through its weekend beer tent. Proceeds have been given to local charities.

As well, the local business community benefited.

"If you get 40 to 50 teams and 20 players on each team, everyone spends around \$100 on food and other things at the festival and in town and it adds up," Mr. Watson said. "Not having the tournament is huge. It's a big thing for the community. It just didn't fly."

Watson had an inkling something was amiss when representatives from teams that normally participated said they weren't coming because they saw notices on an unidentified web site stating the tournament was cancelled.

"Maybe there was a bit of sabotage," said Mr. Watson, who had 10 teams pre-register prior to the tournament's cancellation. "But it's too bad (the tournament won't take place)...I've played in it and umpired in it. It was a fun event."

Festival chairperson Elizabeth Fraser agrees the tournament's absence could hurt attendance.

"We're disappointed there's no tournament. I'm sure there will be people who would have come won't because of the tournament. They would come with their families," she said.

"But I think we have enough going on (at the festival) to keep people busy during the two and a half days when the tournament would normally run. We're sorry the Buttermakers couldn't put anything together and we hope we can have a tournament next year."

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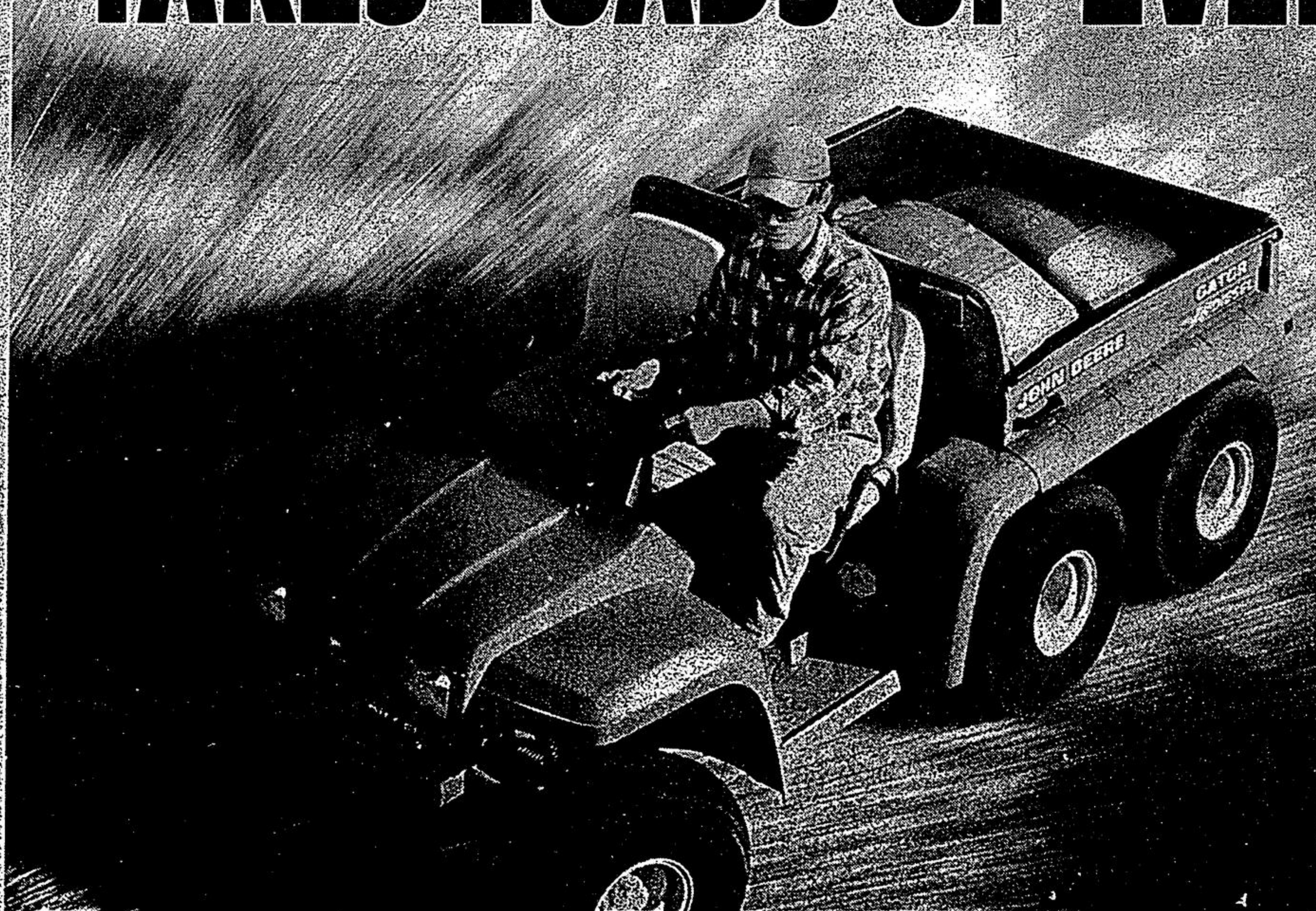
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