

# SPORTS

## New captain plans to lead Spirit by example

Michael Lombardo was skating off the ice after practice Monday when Stouffville Spirit head coach Brian Perrin tapped him on the shoulder.

"I thought I was being cut," said Lombardo, a second-year forward and one of six Stouffville residents on this year's Spirit roster.

It was farthest thing from the truth.

Lombardo, 17, was informed he is the new captain of the Spirit, replacing five-year veteran J.D. Smithson, who graduated last year.

"I'm thrilled and excited," the Grade 12 student at Stouffville District Secondary School said. "I've had it before and I think I know what it takes. But it really hasn't sunk in yet."

Lombardo was the captain of his Stouffville Clippers A and Richmond Hill Stars AAA teams for all 11 years he played minor hockey.

### HOME OPENER TONIGHT

The Spirit opens the Provincial Junior A Hockey League season tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena against the Newmarket Hurricanes. The Spirit eliminated Newmarket in seven games in the second round of last spring's playoff.

Gone from that Spirit roster are its top five scorers.

"We've picked up some young guys who can handle the puck and score," said Lombardo. "I think we've got four solid lines that can finish their checks. And we've got a strong defence."

The blueline improved last week with the addition of Chris Grey. The Newmarket resident played for the Collingwood Blues the last two seasons.

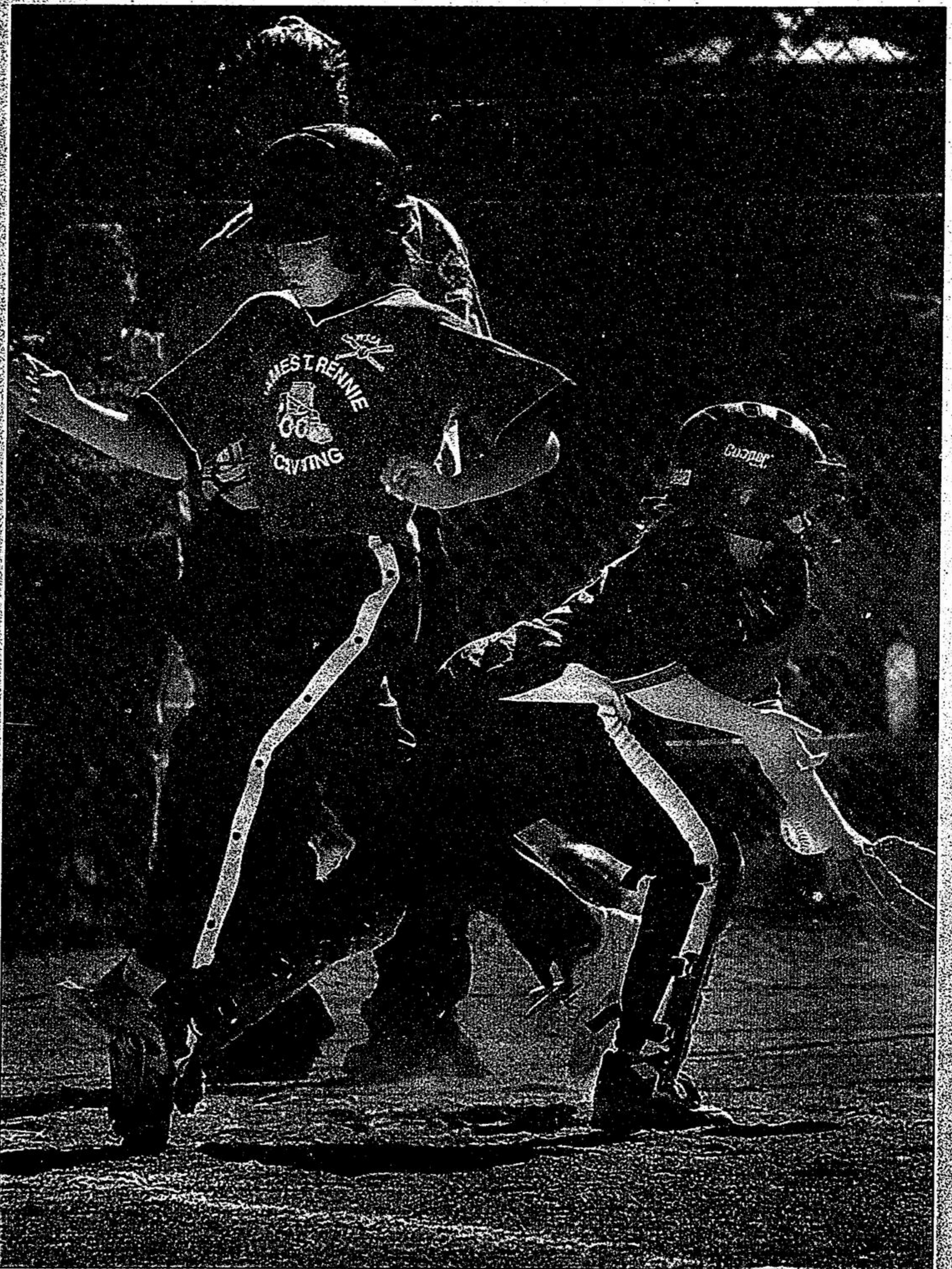
Aside from Lombardo, the five Stouffvillites with the Spirit are returnees Kevin Hayward, Cale Tanaka, Kevin Hayward and Jordan Mabley, rookie Jake Van Allen and OHL veteran Grant Buckley.

Lombardo looked around the arena Tuesday night, recalling Spirit games of the 1990s.

"Used to sit right up there in the first section," he said. "They had the purple and yellow jerseys. Back then, I didn't think I'd ever play for this team, let alone be its captain."

**SPIRITED NOTES:** Michael Commisso, Mark Mitchell and Buckley are the Spirit's assistant captains. Opening ceremonies at tonight's game start at 7:30; the Spirit plays at Aurora tomorrow night where the hometown Tigers will be without goalie Chris Whiteley. He is completing a suspension for shooting a puck into the crowd during last year's league final in Wellington.

See Spirit schedule on page 33.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

### Safe arrival at home

James T. Rennie Excavating baserunner Brittney Williams get past Dr. Sheldon Lazier catcher Kim Keller as the throw slips past her during Saturday's Whitchurch-Stouffville Softball Association squirt girls' house league playoff game at Memorial Park. Stouffville Lioness won the title while James T. Rennie Excavating finished second.



**MICHAEL LOMBARDO:** Stouffville resident named captain of this year's Stouffville Spirit hockey club Monday.

## Local fastball prospects named to national team pool for 2004 season

Two players from the Stouffville and Markham area were identified as potential candidates to represent the Canadian men's fastball team in 2004 and

has been selected to the national team pool.

Stouffville native Paul Koert and Markham native Craig Crawford are the two players

A 24-year-old lefthanded pitcher, Koert, toiled this past season with Owen Sound, which captured the provincial and national titles.

Last season, Koert was a member of the national team finishing second in the Pan-American qualifier.

Crawford, 32, was a member of

Canada's national team that won the gold medal at the recent Pan-American Games in Santo Domingo.

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