

SPORTS

Sabiston was Ace on Hemstead's 1941 title run

Stouffville resident says winning OHA Junior C title was a thrill

BY JIM THOMAS
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He's a chapter out of hockey history.

Bloomington's Jim 'Bus' Sabiston, a survivor of Markham's famed Hemstead's Aces, vividly recalls the 1941 season when the team battled to an Ontario Hockey Association Junior C championship.

The Aces defeated Bolton for the title, winning three games, the last in overtime.

The series had to be completed at Maple Leaf Gardens because the Markham Arena on Hwy. 7 had natural ice and it was in poor shape.

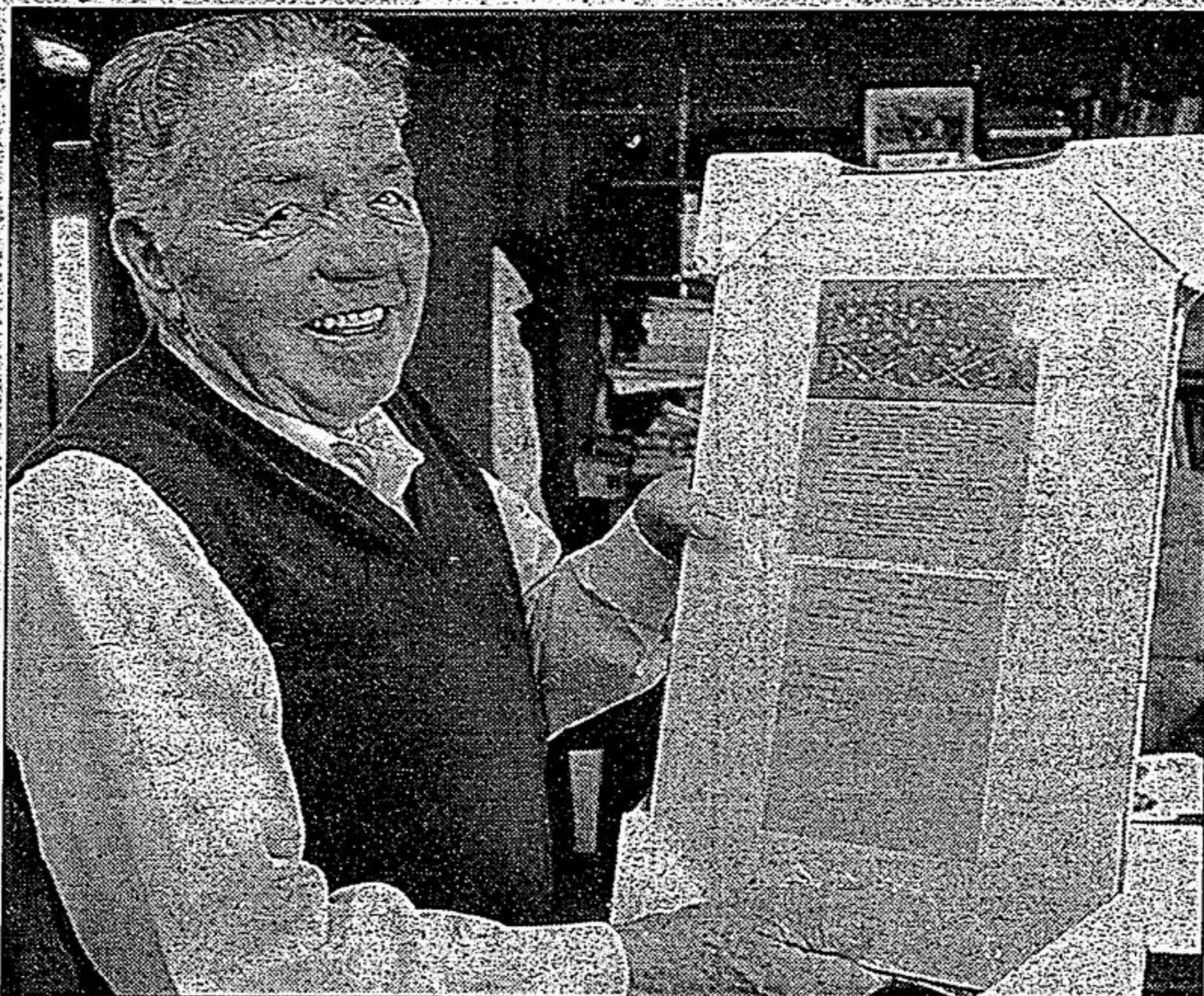
Along the way, Markham defeated Aurora, Newmarket, Lindsay, Cobourg and Parry Sound.

"I'll never forget one game with Parry Sound," Sabiston said. "The team, their fans and a band arrived by train, then marched along Main Street to the rink."

The arena was jammed with spectators hanging from the rafters.

"The arena was jammed with spectators hanging from the rafters," he remembers.

Those were the early years of the Second World War. Hockey gave people something to cheer about, he recalled.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Stouffville resident Jim Sabiston displays the photograph of the Markham-based Hemstead's Aces, a 1941 team he played on that won the Ontario Hockey Association Junior C championship. The photograph on the right is a close up of the championship team. Sabiston is in the back row, fourth from left.

Sabiston played only the one season.

The team's ranks were later depleted when many went overseas.

Born near Unionville, Sabiston played in the Toronto Hockey League before he graduated to the Junior C ranks.

PLAYED ON DEFENCE

With Markham, he played on defence with Stouffville native Bruce Ike Harper.

Others in the Aces lineup included Leo Murphy, Jack Coburn, Nick Bangay, Vic Meharg, Jack Watson, Allan

Boadway, Ronnie Rowe, Skippy Northcott, Austie Baker, Bob Bangay, Jack Harper and Bob Lawrie.

The coach was Ernie Lawrie. John Bayes served as president, Grant Nighswander treasurer, Frank Tunney timekeeper and Danny (Bud) Baker team mascot.

Sabiston describes himself as "a fringe player" with no chance of making the National Hockey League.

Several did advance, however, including Rowe. He signed with the New York Rangers.

Bob Bangay captained the



club. He (Bangay) was our best," Sabiston remembers. "I always thought he'd make it to the big time. Not only was he good, but good and clean."

Such was not the case with some players they played against. "Many relied on brute force because they lacked the necessary skills," he says.

Management, including coach Lawrie, stressed clean play, Sabiston recalls.

The consumption of alcohol was forbidden, he said.

After winning the championship, the Village of Markham hosted a banquet and presented each player with an engraved gold watch.

Sabiston lost his. Several years later, however, it was unearthed in a garden near the corner of Hwy. 7 and McCowan Road.

"My name was on it so I knew it was mine," he noted.

HIT BY TRUCK THREE YEARS AGO

Three years ago, Sabiston suffered a life-threatening injury when run over by a truck in a

gravel pit near Pickering.

His right leg was badly broken, necessitating five weeks in Markham Stouffville Hospital plus several months' convalescence at home.

Later, a cyst developed on his right hip, requiring additional surgery.

"But you can't keep a good man down, as the saying goes."

Many players relied on brute force because they lacked the necessary skills.

Sabiston is back skating again, joining a Thursday afternoon seniors' group at the Stouffville Arena.

"I was a little shaky the first time out," he said.

While it's been 60 years since Sabiston retired, his hockey heydays in Markham will never be forgotten.

An autographed team photo in his home is a constant reminder.

Spirit must get back to basics if it hopes to win series

Stouffville holds 2-1 lead over Thornhill Islanders

Mitch Dillon wasn't good enough to play for the Stouffville Spirit junior A hockey team last season.

On Sunday night, the Aurora resident stuck it to the Spirit right in Stouffville.

Dillon, 18, scored at 8:33 of overtime to give the Thornhill Major Islanders a 4-3 win over the Spirit.

The Spirit, however, leads the opening round best-of-seven Provincial Junior A Hockey League playoff series 2-1, winning the first two games by 4-1 scores.

Game 4 in the series is tonight in Stouffville with Game 5 Saturday at the Thornhill Community Centre. Game 6

would be Sunday in Stouffville and Game 7 Monday in Thornhill, if necessary. All games are 7:30 p.m. starts.

The Major Islanders trailed 3-0 after one period Sunday but scored twice in the second and got the equalizer from Chris Cloutier, with 2:58 left in regulation.

The Major Islanders appeared to have the game won at 2:06 of overtime.

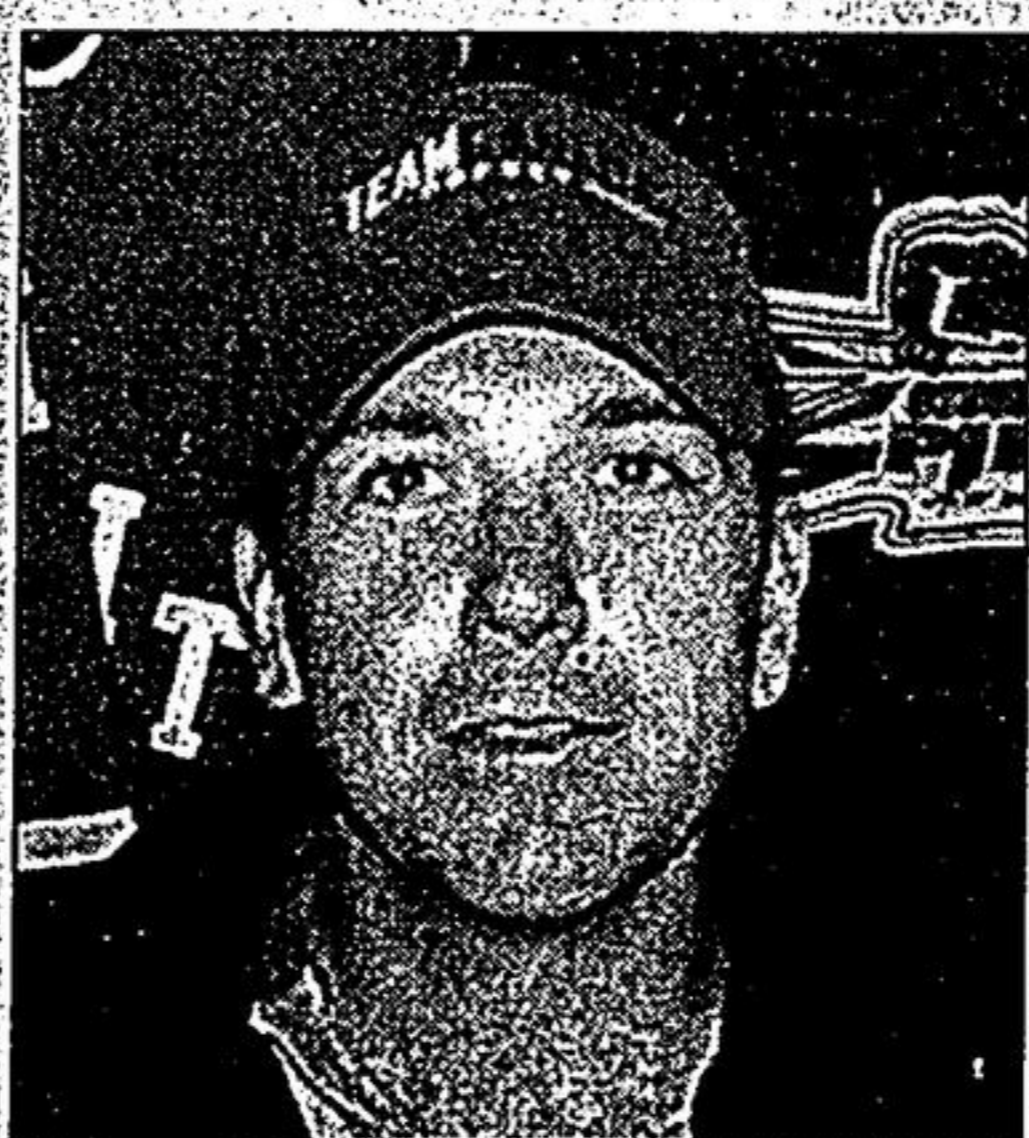
But referee David Koziel waved off an apparent goal after consulting with the linesmen.

FEELING OVERCONFIDENT?

"We played well for the first two games, and the first period Sunday," Spirit head coach Brian Perrin said.

"But after that first period, our guys thought the series was over. Give credit to Thornhill for not giving up."

Dillon, signed by the Spirit in



BRIAN PERRIN: Spirit head coach thought club's complacency was a turning point in Sunday's 4-3 overtime loss.

2002 from the Richmond Hill Stars midgets, was released to Schomberg junior C in January, 2003.

At Thornhill Saturday, Michael Comisso, Jordan Mabley, Kevin Hayward and Michael Duco

scored for the Spirit in its second victory.

Stouffville, outshot the Major Islanders 37-26.

Neil Conway, 16, earned his second straight win and stopped a Major Islanders penalty shot in

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the second period.

"We have to focus on the basics, nothing too complicated," Perrin said before practice Tuesday. "Playoffs come down to hard work and execution. On Sunday we didn't execute."

SPIRITED NOTES: Spirit goalie Daniel Bellissimo obtained from the St. Michael's Buzzers at last month's trade deadline, has not dressed since being injured in the regular sea-

son finale against the Newmarket Hurricanes Feb. 1. Stouffville Clipper and Uxbridge Bruin netminders have backed up Conway

in all three games. The Major Islanders' gangly Jesse Zulauf, a Zdeno Chara look-a-like, has come in for extra attention after harassing Conway early in the series. The much shorter Kevin Lord landed a handful of punches on the 6-foot-6 Zulauf, a former member of the Hurricanes. Sunday ex-Spirit goalie Steve Carota, traded to the Major Islanders last month, has been seen during the series; the Spirit appeared ready to take a 4-2 lead in the third period Sunday when a Major Islanders player pulled the net down before a goal could be scored. Penalty shot, penalty or automatic goal? A two-minute minor was called.

For more information on the Spirit, log on to www.stouffvillespirit.com.