

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

SPORTS

Spartans skate off with first senior hockey crown

Corey Tanaka's heroics lift Stouffville Secondary to York Region title

The Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans senior boys' hockey team won the first York Region Athletic Association hockey title in the school's 50 year history Tuesday.

SDSS, which has had a hockey program for four years, capped off the feat by sweeping the best-of-three final over the Cardinal Carter Catholic High School (Aurora) Celtics with a dramatic 4-3 overtime win at the Oak Ridges Recreation Centre.

Corey Tanaka scored two goals, including the game-winner at the 2:08 mark of the first extra session.

As the score suggested, the contest was a hard-fought battle.

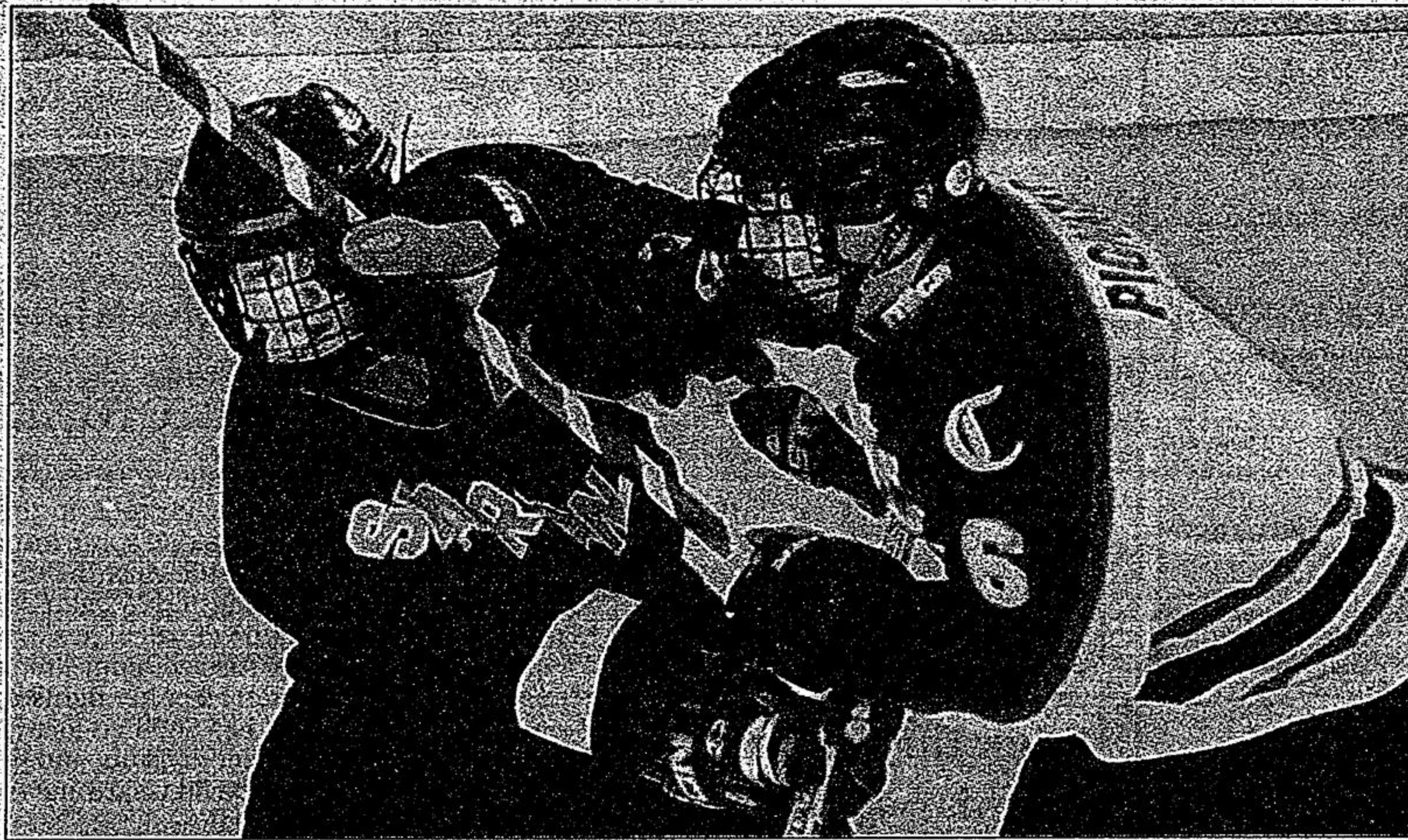
And similar to a number of games that they've been in during the season, the Spartans overcame adversity as they trailed 1-0 just nine seconds into the game before Chris Flanagan knotted the count after the first period.

The Spartans then took a 3-1 lead on goals by Brandon Walker and Tanaka, on a shorthanded effort.

CELTICS FORCE OVERTIME

After the Celtics cut their deficit with a power-play goal before the end of the second period, they forced overtime after pulling their goalkeeper for an extra attacker and scoring with just 38 seconds remaining in regulation time.

"The guys just don't panic," Spartans head coach Jamie Hewitt noted. "I told the guys going into overtime let's settle



Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans Norm Fretz (left) received a high stick from Cardinal Carter Catholic High School Celtics Jared Pignataro during Tuesday's YRAA senior boys' hockey final at the Oak Ridges Recreation Centre. The Spartans won the game and title with a dramatic 4-3 overtime victory.

STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

down and play our system. Do what you did all year. The guys showed a great amount of character. They know what their job is and they get it done. It was a total team effort. The kids play as a team and for each other."

Although the Spartans captured the YRAA title, they made a declaration in October to go in as a AA entrant. Because of this, they must play a York-Durham qualifier with the winner gaining entry to the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association tourney.

The Spartans will face Monsignor John Pereyma (Oshawa) in a one-game showdown tenta-

tively scheduled for Tuesday at 2 p.m. at Stouffville Arena.

"We could be the York Region champions and not go to OFSAA, but hey, that's the rules," he said.

The Celtics, however, will go to OFSAA as the AAA York Region representative for larger schools.

Spartans spike OFSAA berth

The Spartans senior girls' volleyball team earned a berth at the provincial AA playdowns in Goderich after defeating Monsignor John Pereyma (Oshawa) 2-1 Tuesday in its York-Durham qualifier at Stouffville District

Secondary School.

After losing the first game 25-16, the Spartans rallied to win the next two by scores of 29-27 and 15-7.

"I wasn't sure that we would get out of (winning this match)," Spartans head coach Sharon McFarlane said.

The first-game loss served as a rallying cry for the players, she said.

Girls ice tournament title

Although the Spartans girls' hockey team was recently eliminated from the York Region

Athletic Association playoffs after being swept by Markham District High School in their best-of-three semi-final series, they concluded the season on a positive note.

Participating in the Ice Gardens March Classic at York University, the Spartans captured their division title with a 2-0 win over Birchmount Park Collegiate Institute (Toronto) in Tuesday's final.

Hayley Hughes scored both goals for the Spartans and Liz Knox posted the shutout.

In reaching the final, the Spartans defeated Cardinal Newman High School 3-0 and Loretto Abbey 1-0 Monday. The following day, they defeated Holy Name of Mary.

Spartans head coach Dan McConnachie said great goaltending from Knox and the club's ability to produce timely goals were vital ingredients to their success.

"We got great goaltending and great team play. Liz (Knox) stood up to the test. It was definitely a great year."

Spartans hold court

The Spartans senior boys' basketball team won its first-round York Region tier two playoff game last Thursday with a 47-40 victory over host Sutton District High School.

Mike DeVries led the Spartans with 16 points.

With the win, the Spartans advanced to the semifinals and play a road game today against Toronto District Christian High School (Woodbridge).

The other semifinal pits Unionville High School against William Mulock (Newmarket).

Some Spirit players say final farewell to Stouffville

Juniors sent packing after Sunday's 4-3 double-overtime loss

The veteran and the kid sat next to each other for the Stouffville Spirit team photo at the Stouffville Arena Monday night.

Twenty-four hours earlier, they were playing their final game of the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League season, a crushing 4-3 double overtime loss to the Newmarket Hurricanes.

Newmarket, which plays Aurora in the North Conference final starting tomorrow, tied the game with one second left in regulation time and went on to win the best-of-seven series in five games.

Michael Commisso and Neil Conway were key cogs in a Spirit season affected by youth, injury and departure.

Commisso, 20, graduates after three seasons with the Spirit. He

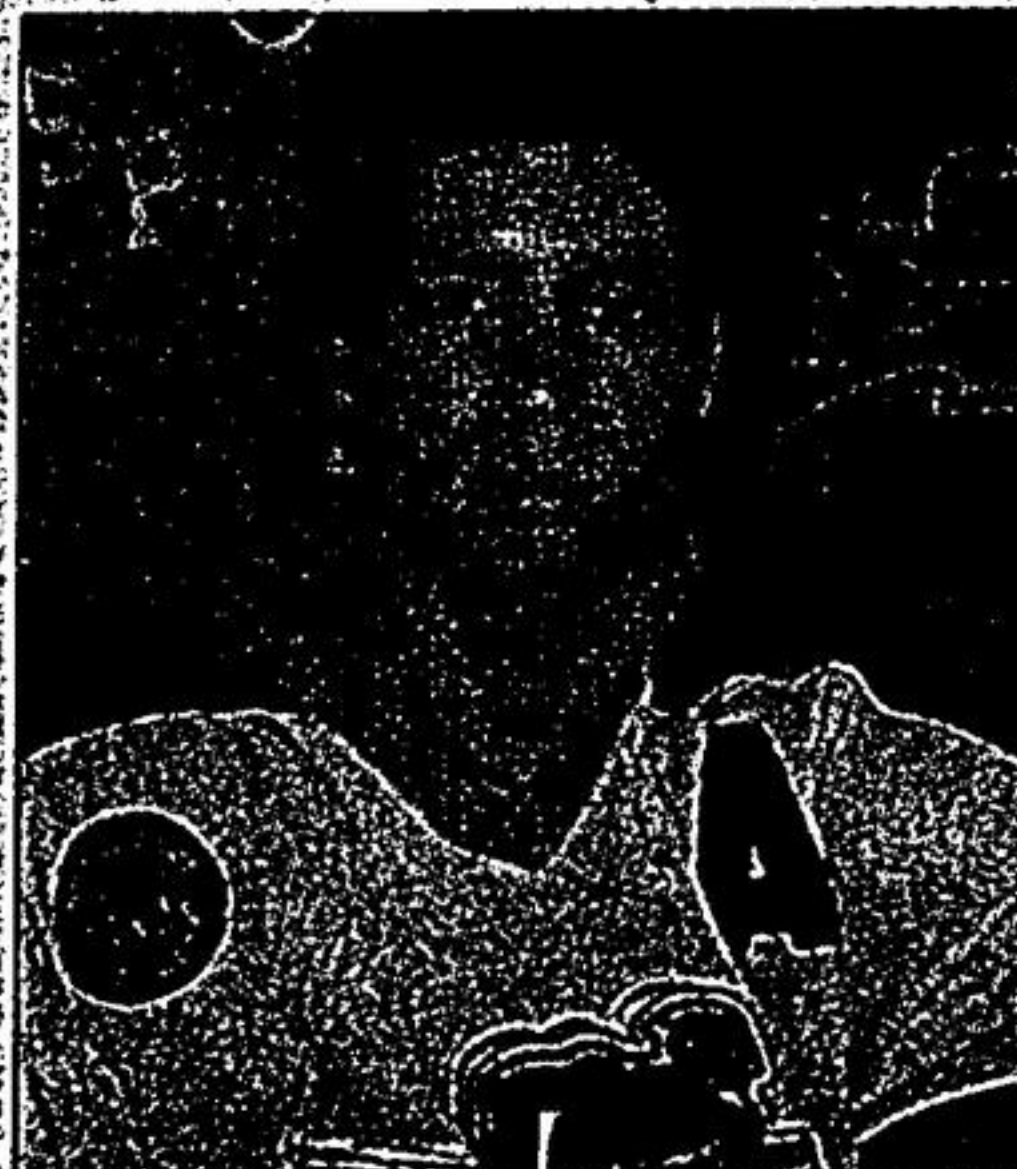
hopes to play for the University of Windsor next year, health permitting.

He separated his left shoulder last year during the Spirit's playoff upset of Newmarket. After a summer of rehab and training, he separated it again, swimming in Lake Superior in his home town of Schreiber, Ont., the day before leaving for Spirit training camp.

The assistant captain separated his other shoulder Oct. 16 against Wexford. Later, after his fifth separation of the season, he thought about quitting, but took time off and limped through to the end.

"I can't say enough about Michael, basically playing the season without shoulders," Spirit head coach Brian Perrin said. "His heart and soul, the kind of kid you love to have on your team."

Spirit general manager Ken Burrow calls Commisso "The toughest kid I've ever seen, bar none."



MICHAEL COMMISSO: Earned plaudits from Spirit coaching staff after finishing playing career with Stouffville Sunday.

For his part, Commisso wishes he could return.

"My time in Stouffville couldn't have been any better," he said. "Great coaching and a great organization that treated me very well."

Mark Mitchell and Grant Buckley are the other players graduating due to age.

U.S. NATIONALS LIKE CONWAY

Conway, who turned 16 in January, may not be back either, but not because the Spirit doesn't want him.

The youngest goalie in the Provincial league, he is being considered for the U.S. under-17 hockey team based in Michigan.

The Cleveland native played all 11 playoff games for the Spirit, after veteran goalie Daniel Bellissimo, acquired at the trade deadline from St. Mike's, came down with an injury in the last game of the regular season and eventually left the team.

"Neil was always the first one to the rink and one of our hardest workers," Perrin said. "For a 16-year-old to play into the playoffs on a team with a depleted defence is amazing. He will have

great success in hockey."

The missing defencemen included Ian Brunt (left team), Mark Mitchell (injury), Jeff Moor (suspension) and Breen Taylor (work commitments). That forced forwards to play on the blueline and 16-year-old defencemen Simon Gysbers and Blake Pullin to play key roles.

GAME DAYS: The Spirit won one of the most exciting games in franchise history Friday, a 4-3 double overtime decision in Game 4.

Kory Helowka scored the game-winner at 18 seconds of the second overtime, after fellow Newmarket resident Rick Schrank tied the game with 10:58 to play in the third in front of a standing-room-only crowd of 700 fans at the Stouffville Arena. Shane Baxter and Commisso scored the other Spirit goals.

In Sunday's finale, Jordan Mabley, Commisso and Ty Raine scored.