

SPORTS

OHL teams come calling for Stouffville prospects on draft selection day

Tanaka, Walker and Conway selected by major junior clubs

BY JIM THOMAS
Correspondent

Three Stouffville residents took a giant step towards progressing up the hockey ladder last weekend when they were selected in the Ontario Hockey League's annual priority selection.

Cory Tanaka and Brandon Walker, both students at Stouffville District Secondary School and Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association grads, were picked by the Plymouth Whalers.

Neil Conway, a goalkeeper with the Stouffville Spirit of the Provincial Junior A Hockey League this past season, was chosen by the Owen Sound Attack.

A second-round pick by the Whalers and 24th player chosen overall in the 15-round lottery, Tanaka, 15, spent the last eight years with the Richmond Hill Stars minor hockey organization.

This past season as a member of the Stars AAA minor midget squad, the 5-foot-11, 165-pound centre amassed 28 goals and 51 assists.

Currently in Grade 10, Tanaka is the younger brother of Stouffville Spirit forward Cale Tanaka.

Expecting to report to the Whalers' rookie camp June 4, Tanaka is confident he can make the Ontario Hockey League club.

But he remains uncertain how much ice time he will see.

What Tanaka will miss most



NEIL CONWAY: Spirit goalie and Cleveland native taken in fourth round by Owen Sound Attack.



CORY TANAKA: Richmond Hill Stars forward drafted in second round by Plymouth Whalers.

though is in moving to a place far removed from Stouffville and in being close to those he knows well.

"I'm really excited," he said, "but I'll miss my friends."

'A career in hockey would be a dream come true. I'll take it as far as I can.'

Noting that their club did not possess plenty of offensive firepower this past season, Whalers general manager and head coach Mike Vellucci was pleased to acquire a proven scorer like Tanaka.

With their first pick, the Whalers selected Markham's John Armstrong, who also proved he could generate some offensive punch.

"We wanted to draft players who have speed, skill and can score goals," he said.

"One thing we needed is goal scorers. Last season we didn't score a lot of goals even though strength — most came on the power play. With Armstrong and Tanaka, we were able to address what we needed. Both are playmakers and great character players who come from winning programs."

A 5-foot-9, 170-pound forward, the 15-year-old Walker was a ninth-round pick by the Whalers and was the 173rd player chosen overall.

Like Tanaka, Walker was a member of the Stars AAA minor midget team and enjoyed an outstanding season as a left winger, compil-

ing 36 goals and 51 assists.

Both were also members of the Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans senior hockey team that won the York Region Athletic Association title.

Walker though, expects to stay in Stouffville and play with the Spirit.

Last weekend, he skated at the Spirit's rookie camp at Stouffville Arena.

Following graduation from Stouffville District Secondary School, he hopes to attend university on a hockey scholarship south of the border.

"It was an honour to be drafted," he said. "It was expected but I wasn't sure where or when."

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, the 16-year-old Conway was chosen in the fourth round by the Attack and was the 76th pick overall.

Conway joined the Spirit last fall as a 15-year-old rookie from the Pittsburgh, Pa., AAA midgets. He eventually became the Spirit's first-string goalie and recorded a 3.46 goals against average, winning 17 games while losing nine in the regular schedule. During the playoffs he won five games while losing six.

Conway said that playing with in Stouffville this past season was the best thing that happened to him.

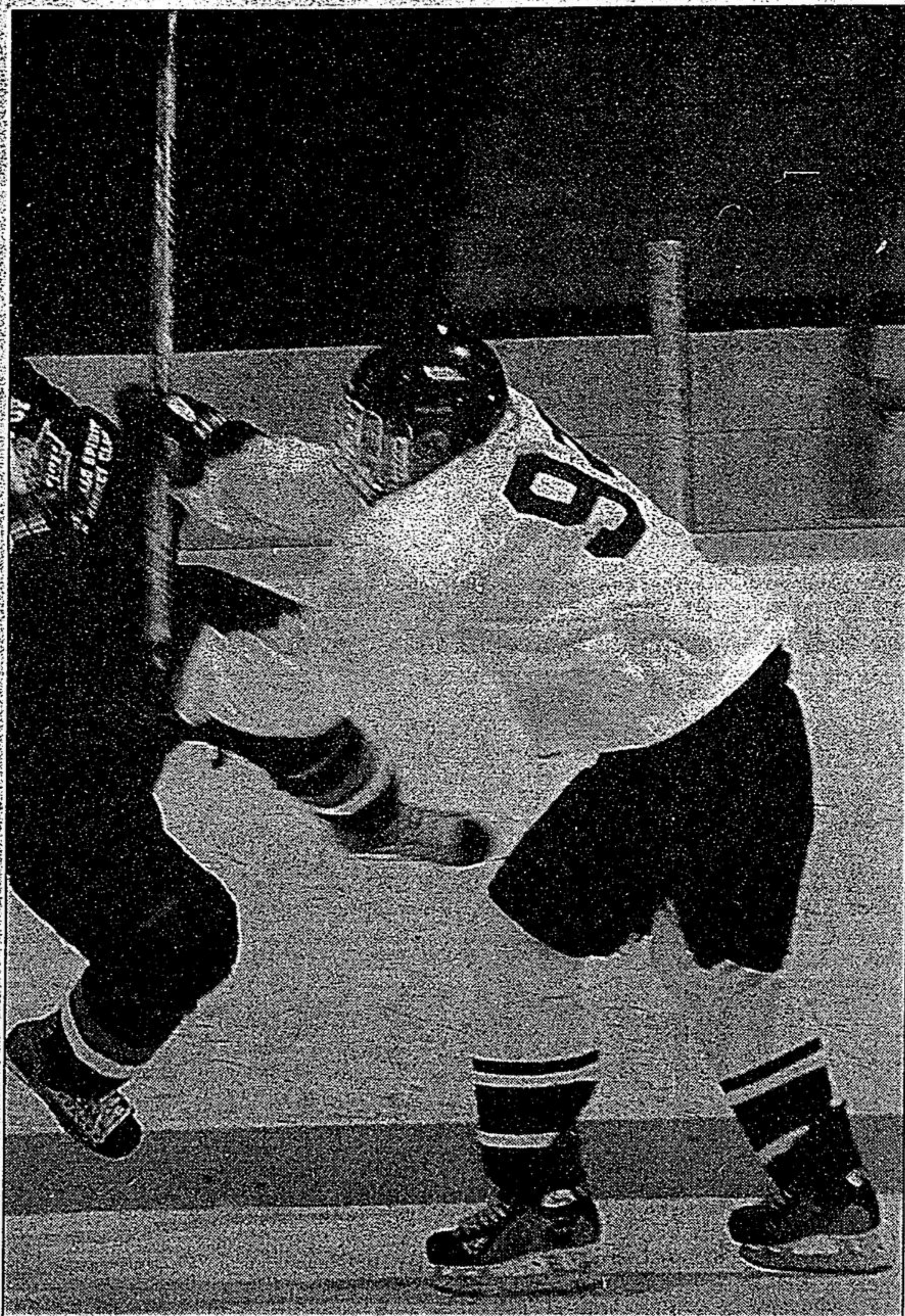
"Playing with the Spirit was awesome," he said "being drafted came as a surprise."

Conway hopes that being drafted in the OHL will be a step towards pursuing a possible professional hockey career.

"A career in hockey would be a dream come true. I'll take it as far as I can," he said.



BRANDON WALKER: Plymouth Whalers select Richmond Hill Stars forward in ninth round.



STAFF PHOTO/SIOERD WITTEVEEN

School of hard knocks

The Stouffville Spirit Junior A hockey team held its annual rookie camp at the Stouffville Arena last weekend. Rick Sutton (above) delivers a hard hit on a fellow player. More than 100 players from across Ontario auditioned. Training camp opens in mid-August with about half of last year's team expected to return.

General meeting brings good news, money to minor hockey parents

Rebate of \$30 given to parents of 520 house league players

BY JIM THOMAS
Correspondent

What a difference a year makes.

At the 2003 annual meeting of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association, parents in attendance were vehement over anticipated increases in house league registration fees.

As a result, a sub-committee was created to study the plan.

At this year's meeting, held April 26, the effect was obvious. The atmosphere was upbeat and the mood positive.

"One of the best years ever," Joe Cornacchia, association president said "everyone did a great job."

Cornacchia announced a \$30 rebate for 520 house league players. Even with that, he said, the association would conclude the season with a surplus of \$24,000.

As an indication of progress made, Cornacchia said 2003 was a break-even year and in 2002 they were \$5,000 in the red.