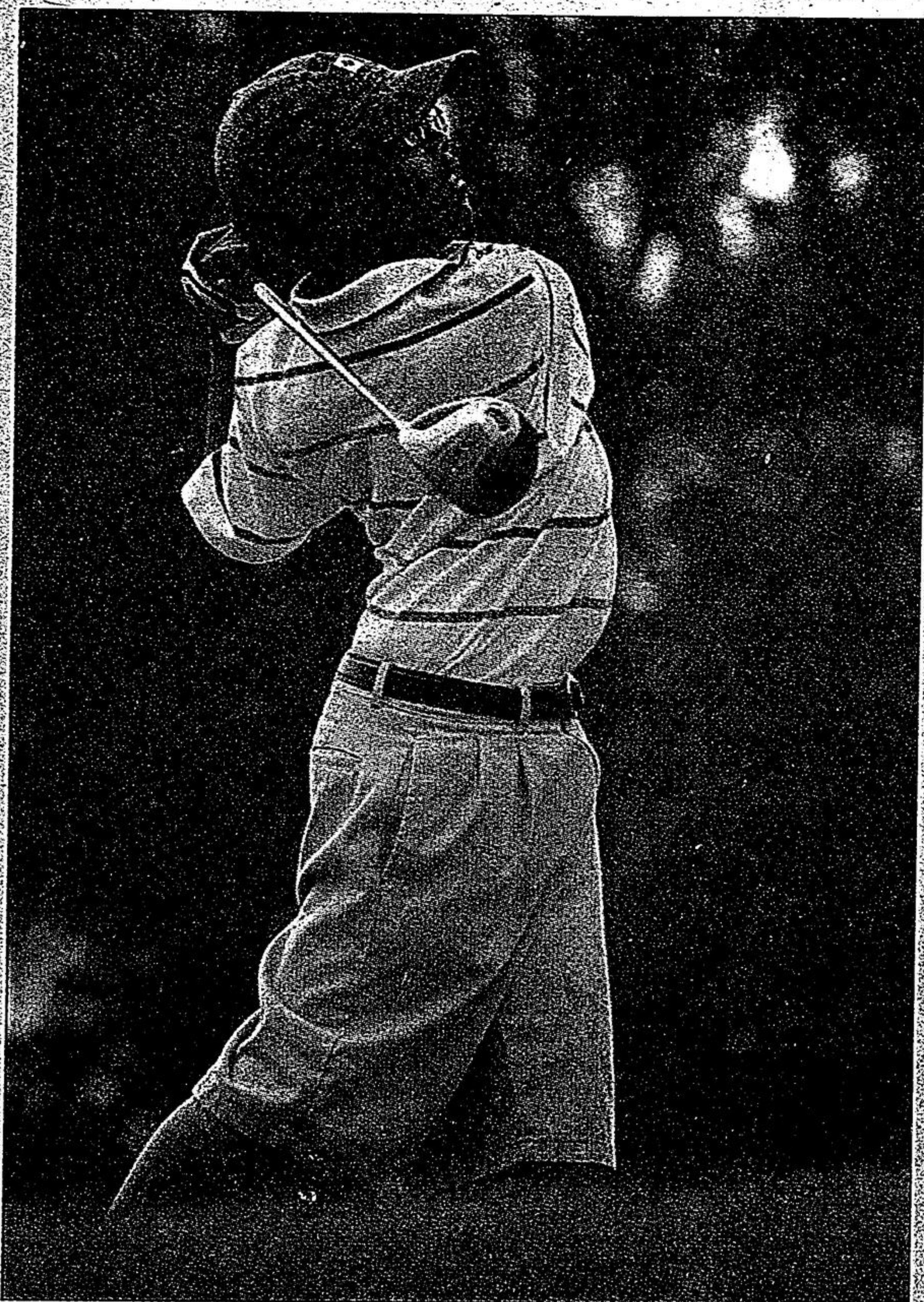


SPORTS



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

In the swing of things

Markham's Gajan Sivabalasingham, 10, watches intently as his drive travels down the fairway at last week's Canadian Junior Golf Association linksters event at Bushwood Golf Club, which is just south of Stouffville. A member of the Mandarin Golf and Country Club in Markham, Gajan won an unprecedented ninth straight CJGA event of this season. He carded a three-over par 75 to win the one-day event in the 10-and-under division by three shots.

Caira's delivery buoys Jaguars to national fastball crown

Gormley resident earns MVP honours in playoffs

BY JIM THOMAS
Correspondent

You can't hit what you can't see.

This age-old adage was never more prominent than during the Canadian bantam girls' fastball championships in Winnipeg.

Using a delivery clocked at 60 miles-per-hour, plus a back-breaking off-speed pitch and a vicious curve, Jenna Caira hurled Markham Jaguars to a 4-1 victory over White Rock, B.C. Renegades to win the national title.

For the 15-year-old Gormley resident, this was her third time attending the nationals.

The Cardinal Carter Catholic High School student was a pick-up player with London in 2002, with the Leaside Lightning last year and with Markham this season.

The Jaguars earned the right to advance by placing second in the provincials held at Kitchener. At both the provincials and the nationals, Caira was voted the playoffs most valuable player.

BEGINNINGS IN OAK RIDGES

Caira's introduction to fastball occurred at Oak Ridges, where her family resided for 18 years. Later, she suited up with Aurora and



JENNA CAIRA: Markham Jaguars pitcher displays MVP playoff trophy she won at nationals in Winnipeg.

Scarborough before moving over to Leaside and now Markham.

"Wherever the manager goes, I go," says the 5-foot-8 righthander. She describes Bob Acton, the Markham coach as "wonderful."

"He (Acton) has a passion for the game," she says, "he keeps us focussed."

At the same time, Caira notes, he insists his players enjoy themselves — have fun. Acton said much of what the Jaguars accomplished this season would not have been possible without Caira's performance.

"She's in a class by her own," he said.

What makes her a success, he said, is how she approaches the game.

"She works harder than anybody, and she takes care of herself," he said.

Caira would be the first to acknowledge much of her success would not have been possible without the coaching she's received from Julie Brooks, a former pitcher in the Markham girls' system who plays professionally in Houston, Texas.

Making Caira's performance at the nationals even more impressive was the fact that she's just a first-year bantam but played like a seasoned performer. At the nationals, the majority of players were second-year bantams.

PLAYS YEAR-ROUND

For Caira, fastball is a year-round sport.

During winter months, she trains indoors up to six nights a week.

Her regular softball season, from May through August, includes 16 tournaments and more than 115 games in both Canada and the United States.

"This season was very special," says Caira, "because, as a first-year bantam team, we expected to do well but not win a Canadian championship. We're all very happy and extremely proud."

As for her future, Caira hopes to attend university on a fastball scholarship and maybe, just maybe, have an opportunity to pitch for Canada in a future Olympics.

"That would be the ultimate," Caira says, "I'll keep working hard and improve every year."

Fleury teaches the game of golf for the love of it

Stouffville resident helps youngsters to improve their game

BY JIM THOMAS
Correspondent

A golf pro residing in the heart of golf country.

This is the situation in which Rhonda Fleury finds herself. And the Stouffville resident loves it.

"We're surrounded," she says of the many courses in the area, with more on the way, she predicts.

Fleury is a partner in the Henry Brunton Golf Academy, which operates out of Angus Glen Golf Club in Unionville.

While the program is open to all ages, Fleury spends much of her instructional time with young people, a group she describes as

"the future of the game."

The school currently accommodates 28 juniors including 26 boys and two girls.

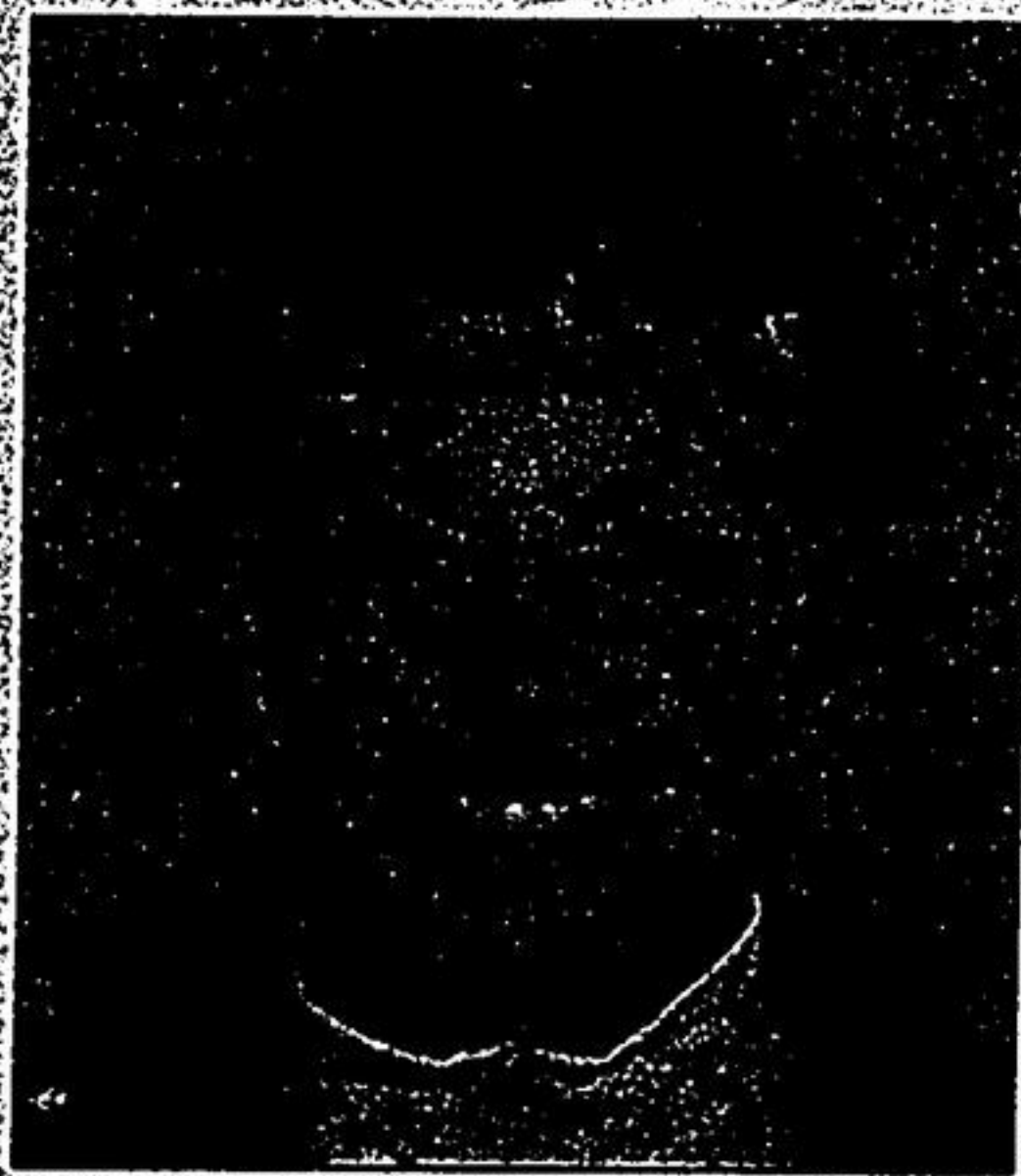
While age 13 is a popular starting point, it's not unusual to have children as young as four honing their skills.

Fleury says she has no gender preference when it comes to teaching, but admits boys, for the most part, have a better work ethic and seem more committed than girls.

COMPETES AS A PRO

Fleury joined the pro ranks following a five-year apprentice program. And while she still competes, using her talents to teach others is a top priority.

She has worked out of several clubs including Midland, Credit Valley, Lambton and Maple Downs.



RHONDA FLEURY: Is a partner in the Henry Brunton Golf Academy that is based at Angus Glen Golf Club.

"She's in her first year at Angus Glen, a course she describes as wonderful."

During the off-season, she

instructs out of the Ultimate Golf Facility at Hwys. 7 and 427. There, much of the program involves extra-curricular advice on proper nutrition and physical fitness.

While somewhat of an oddity, the 36-year-old righthander never had a professional idol while advancing through the ranks.

IDOLIZED FATHER

"My hero was my father," she says. "He loved the game and was good at it, too."

The Brunton Academy's strive for excellence program includes fitting students into various colleges and universities on scholarships.

While important, Fleury considers it unwise for boys and girls to pin their hopes solely on bids to become part of the pro-golf tour.

"All have dreams," she says, "but an academic education should come first."

Less than one per cent make it to the tour, she notes.

While Fleury concentrates on instruction, she still enjoys competing.

Over the years, she's won several pro events. Her average is 72 and her distance range around 240 yards.

With respect to living here, Fleury calls Stouffville an "unbelievable place."

"I love the small-town atmosphere," she adds, "it's a wonderful experience."

While instructing young people on the finer points of the golf game is her passion, Fleury says players of all ages must never lose sight of one essential: "(Golf) should always be fun," she stressed.