

SPORTS

Spirit hope experience will pay off in a division title

Spirit to host Newmarket tonight in season opener

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

The last time anyone laid eyes on the Stouffville Spirit, it was on the short end of a disappointing playoff series loss to the Newmarket Hurricanes last spring.

It was a series in which the young, upstart Spirit had the Hurricanes pinned to the mat but could not finish.

Instead, the more experienced Newmarket side reeled off three straight wins and a berth in the North Conference final.

Since then, the Spirit has grown up some.

Or at least that's the hope of general manager Ken Burrows.

Anchored by 15 returning players, perhaps this is the season the franchise claims its first North Conference title. Well, there's nothing like walking through the fire-zone to steel one's will.

"A lot of the returning guys are really hungry and that can lead to something special if it can be harnessed and going in the right direction," said Burrows, who also hired former Lindsay Muskies' assistant coach Dan West to replace ousted head coach Brian Perrin.

"We were up 2-1 and didn't have the closer. But I think we've grown up and matured."

Spirit fans will hope that's the case. Because this North Conference may be even more competitive than ever this season, and last season was no slouch in that department when you consider no single team failed to survive the season with loss totals in single digits.

(Scorer's note: The Seguin Bruins, who play from Humphrey Township near PARRY SOUND, are an expan-



KEN BURROWS: Spirit general manager believes returning players have matured.

sion team bringing the North to seven teams).

So, what gets Burrows wound up about the upcoming season that starts tonight when the Hurricanes visit the Stouffville Arena.

"Our attitude," he said. "From what we have done over the summer, (the players) understand what's going on and should be ready for what's happening at the start of the season."

"I think some of the kids in the past have been uptight. They go to the OHL camps and get all stressed, their heads are spinning... but now they've all been through that. We're just that much more mature this year and seem ready to go."

From the outset, the Spirit will have the services of Randy Johnston, who posted a point per game in 30 games upon his return from the OHL last season. And Brock Ouelett and Cory Battista joined the squad after opening night a year ago but will be in tonight's lineup when the Spirit host the Hurricanes in the regular season opener at 7:30 p.m.

Still, it will take more than that trio of players to boost their games.

"Every vet can improve his numbers offensively," said Burrows, whose franchise is

seeking its first conference title.

On defence, Simon Gysbers, who will attend Lake Superior State next season on a scholarship, and Ian Brunt are the anchors.

Both Dan McWhinney, the lone Spirit entering his final season of eligibility, and Steve Filippelli, return to handle the goaltending chores.

Up front, leading scorer Ty Raine has departed and will play for the Niagara Falls Canucks (Jr. B) while attending Brock University and Patrick Lee is signed with the Erie Otters of the OHL.

Burrows anticipates a rebound season from Joel Sheppard, obtained from the Hurricanes in a deal for 45-point man Carson Devine, the team's second leading scorer a year ago.

RETURNING PLAYERS

Goal: Steve Filippelli, Dan McWhinney.

Defence: Jeff Barbieri, Ian Brunt, Simon Gysbers, Daniel Spivak.

Forward: Will Acton, Cory Battista, Scott Brown, Rob Groom, Randy Johnston, Brock Ouelett, Blake Pullin, Rick Schrank, Jake Van Allen.

DEPARTING PLAYERS

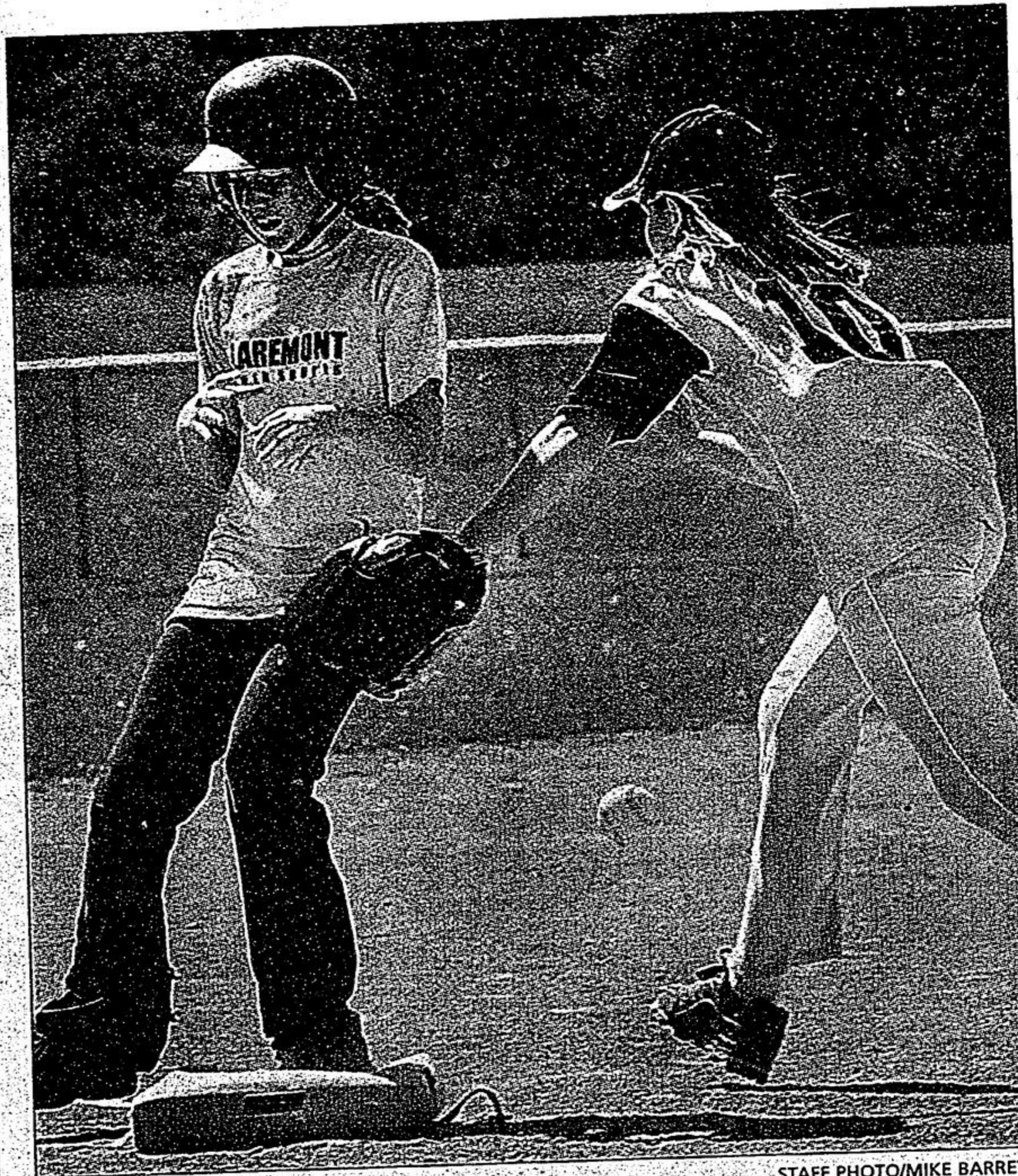
Defence: Sean Gray (New England College, NCAA), Jody Halas (Collingwood Jr. A), Brett Waters (Lindsay Jr. A).

Forward: Mike Aiello (Ajax Jr. A), Patrick Lee (Erie Otters, OHL), Mike Lombardo, Ty Raine (Niagara Falls Canucks Jr. B), Brandon Walker (Aurora Tigers Jr. A).

NEW PLAYERS

Defence: Miles Gomes (York Simcoe Express midget), Matt Hoffman (North York Rangers midget), James McIntosh (Markham Islanders minor midget).

Forward: Mike Foy (North Toronto midget), Darcy Gray (Bradford Bulls Jr. C), Shawn Frank (Toronto Red Wings minor midget), Mark Sullivan (Uxbridge Jr. C).



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

A case of the dropsies

Claremont Youth Sports base runner Natasha Watson (left) received a break when Stouffville Giles Chev Olds third baseman Taylor Macpherson dropped the ball while attempting to put a tag on her during Saturday's Whichchurch-Stouffville Softball Association house league round-robin playoff game at Memorial Park. Stouffville Giles Chev Olds won 16-15. But Claremont gained revenge in Sunday's final tilt by defeating Stouffville Giles Chev Olds.

Mennos drop semi-final series opener to Cobourg

Stouffville Mennos' manager Art Burkholder felt the majority of the team brought their "B" game to Cobourg Tuesday when the two clubs opened the best-of-three Oshawa City and District Softball League semi-final series.

For the Mennos, that didn't bode well as they dropped a 4-0 decision to the host Diamond Kings.

The only bright spot for the Mennos was starting pitcher Byron Baranieski, who struck out eight batters and surrendered just seven hits.

The Diamond Kings capitalized on two Mennos' errors in the first inning to score twice and take a 2-0 lead.

Cobourg then added two more runs in the third inning on three hits and a walk.

Rich Burkholder and Brett Boyd each had one hit for the Mennos off winning pitcher Wayne Wells.

The series resumes tonight at Memorial Park at 7 p.m. If the Mennos can win that game, a deciding contest would follow later that night.



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