New Jr. A hockey league has York Region franchises

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

The Provincial Jr. A Hockey League may face new competition if a proposed rival league faces off as planned next season.

The president of a fledgling Greater Metro Jr. A Hockey League claims to have six member teams lined up already, including locations in Bradford, Richmond Hill and Thornhill, with plans to launch a 42-game schedule for the 2006-07 season.

Fronted by Bob Russell, who operates the World Hockey Centre, a hockey development program near Alliston, the proposed league would take aim at the younger end of the junior age scale with player development as its rallying point.

Russell has owned OHA teams in the past, including the Thornhill Rattlers and Shelburne Wolves, both former members of the Metro Toronto and Provincial leagues. His organization also has operated the World Junior Hockey League.

"We want to provide something we feel is of the highest level," said Russell, who recently purchased the Bradford Bulls Junior C franchise and plans to move the Toronto Rattlers in its place in that community next season.

Quinte, West Nipissing and Gravenhurst are also slated for franchises.

The GMHL will cap the number of older players while providing a developmental setting for 15- and 16-year-old players. The Provincial league restricted so-called underage players to two per team.

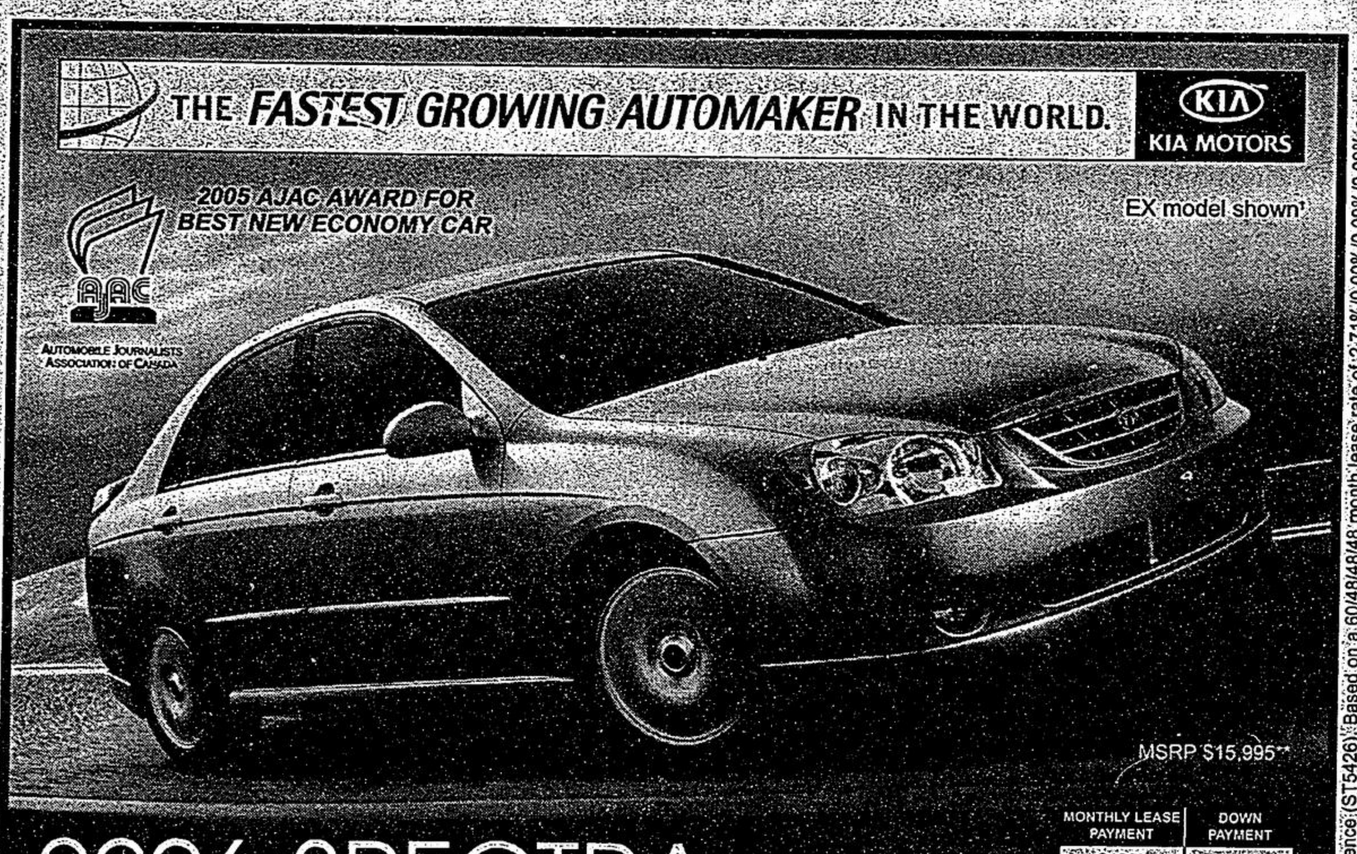
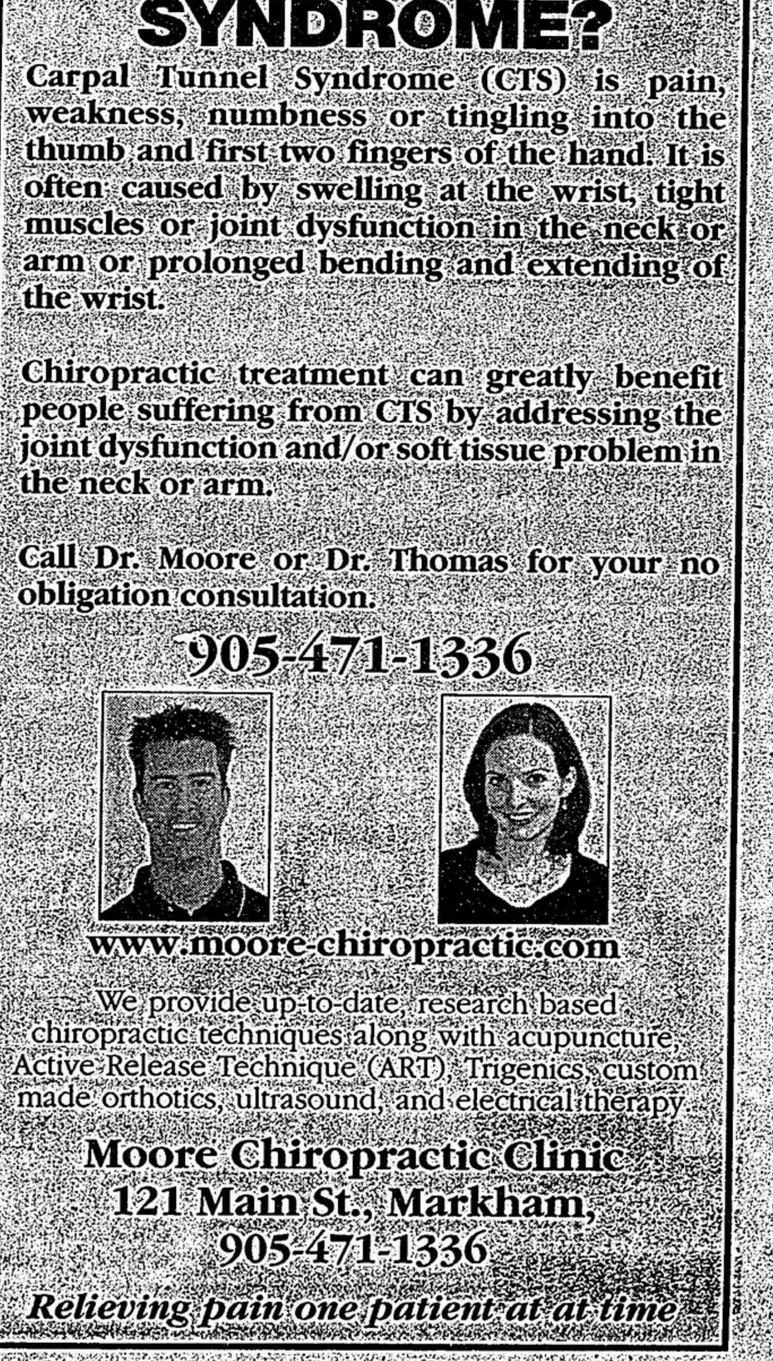
Teams must provide at least three practices per week but points out some, such as his Bradford entry, will have 10 per week.

The league will also select an all-star team to compete in a series of games against NCAA schools.

He said discussions with 16 OHA and Northern Ontario Hockey Association teams reveals most operate at a deficit, often because they compensate players. After being involved with two teams in the past, he has an insider's perspective.

"Ninety per cent are losing money," he observed. "The strongest teams are recruiters, not developers. We did at the time what the other teams in the league did to compete," Russell said.

"What we're doing is what we think should be done. It's better in my opinion when these kids are getting showcased and seen. Maybe we're being selfish, but we have a school and we want to develop kids."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