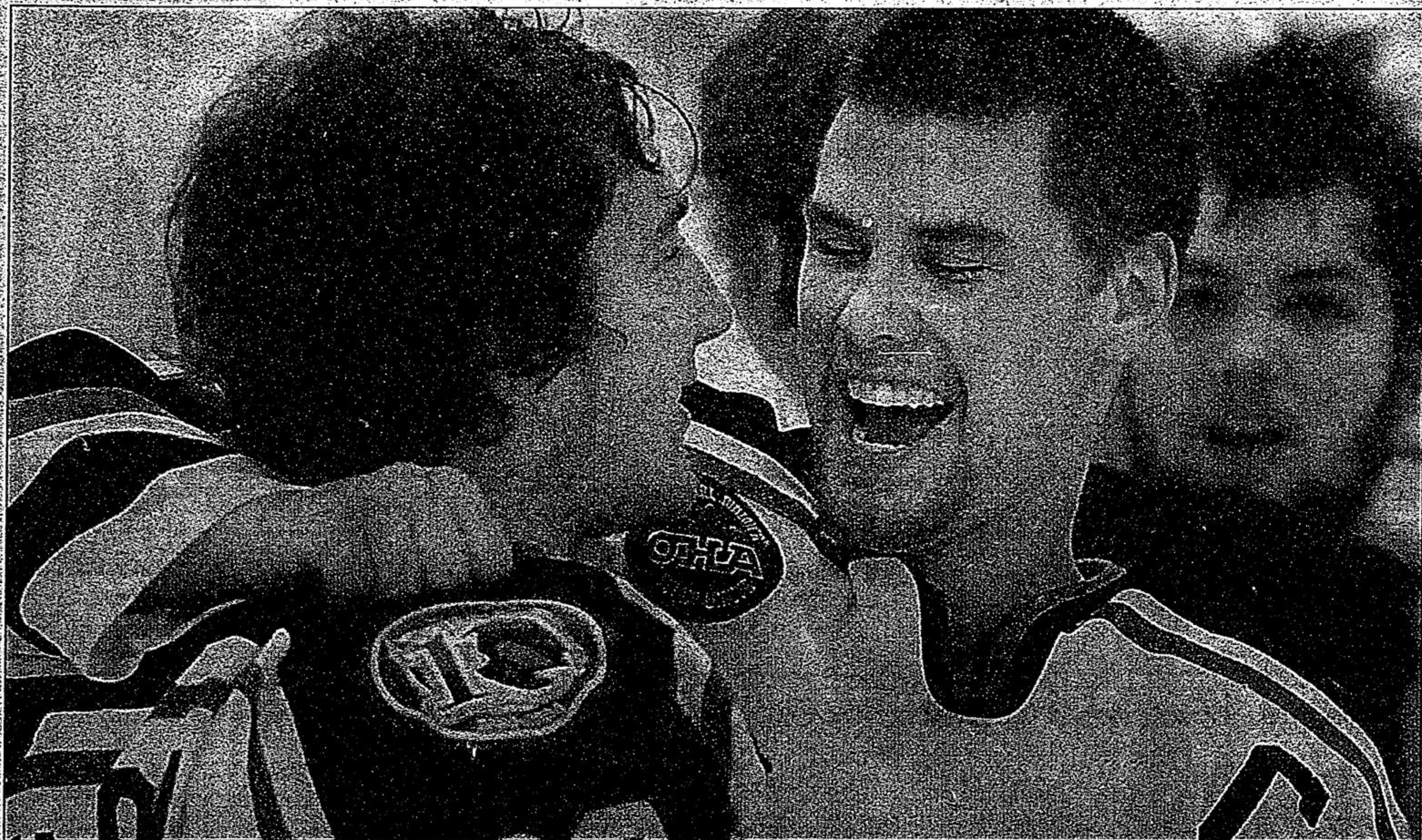




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Spirited hug for overtime hero



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

Stouffville Spirit captain Ian Brunt (right) congratulates teammate Randy Johnston, who scored the series-winning goal in double overtime Sunday night at the Stouffville Arena. The Spirit won the Provincial Jr. A Hockey League's North Conference championship in six games, drawing more than 1,000 people to the final game. The Spirit opens the North-West final tonight at 7:30 at the Stouffville Arena.

New champs get back to business tonight

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
 Staff Writer

The Stouffville Spirit enters uncharted territory tonight and they feel good about it.

The Spirit makes their long-awaited debut in the Provincial Junior A Hockey League's semifinals against the Oakville Blades, who captured the West Conference title by defeating the Hamilton Red Wings in four straight games.

Hosting tonight's first game at 7:30, the Spirit earned the right to be in the league's final four by dethroning the four-time defending North Conference champion Aurora Tigers Sunday at the Stouffville Arena.

Championship celebration goes from arena to town hall/pages 18 & 19

The Spirit won in dramatic fashion before an enthusiastic throng of 1,050 with a 4-3 double overtime win in the sixth game of the best-of-seven series.

"It sure feels good," said Spirit general manager Ken Burrows, who has been associated with the club since near the start 11 years ago. "It was a little longer and harder than what I thought, that's for sure."

Randy Johnston scored the game-winning goal just 17 seconds into a power-play

opportunity after referee Terry Hobor called a penalty on Tigers' defenceman Nathan Oke.

Mr. Johnston, who also scored an overtime winner in Game 3, blew an ice-level shot past Tigers' netminder Ryan Dickie from the right wing for his second goal of the game to hand the Spirit franchise its first conference championship.

The Spirit players piled on Mr. Johnston in a corner of the ice surface as the crowd erupted.

The Tigers were incensed by the call on Mr. Oke, whose apparent elbow sent Donovan

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QUEEN'S PARK PROTEST PRECEDES BUDGET

Farmers: we're dead without help

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
 Staff Writer

Sitting on a broken tractor parked at the Ontario legislature, Gormley farmer John Doner has a message for Ontario Agriculture Minister Leona Dombrowsky.

"Farmers have nothing left to lose," Mr. Doner said.

"If the provincial budget (being delivered today) doesn't include substantial money for farmers, the industry may not survive."

While Ms. Dombrowsky wouldn't speculate on what the budget might contain, she did stress the agricultural sector is a priority for her government.

As well, Ms. Dombrowsky is suggesting farmers' real fight is in Ottawa.

The four-day protest, organized by the Unified Voice for Agriculture, began Monday.

Much like the industry, Mr. Doner's tractor has seen better days.

"It's better that it broke down on the steps of the government than in the field. I'm going to have to get it towed out of here."

Mr. Doner is not alone. Keswick farmer John Holtrop abandoned his 4,500-acre crop operation to join the protest that initially involved about 25 Ontario farmers.

Having farmed for 42 years, Mr. Holtrop has seen good and bad times. But nothing compares to now.

"We need immediate money," Mr. Holtrop said. "We especially need a risk-management program."

While the province tables today's budget, the two York Region farmers

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