

# The Nuge: Teaching legend named Stouffville's best sport

BY JIM MASON  
Staff Writer

It's a month of honours for Wayne Nugent.

The Nuge, the former Stouffville resident and teacher, has been named Whitchurch-Stouffville's 2007 sports person of the year.

He will receive the award Thursday evening in Memorial Park at opening ceremonies of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival.

The native of Quebec who coached and taught at Stouffville District Secondary School from 1976 to 1982, retires this month from a 42-year teaching career. He will be honoured at a reception Monday in Woodbridge, where he now teaches.

He has been taking chemotherapy treatments for advanced bone marrow cancer this year.

Mr. Nugent, 66, is a charter member of the Stouffville Buttermakers slo-pitch team, whose Canada Day weekend tournament during the 1980s spawned the Strawberry Festival. He also refereed hockey in Stouffville.

Mr. Nugent was pursuing a career in professional baseball — rising to the Double-A level as a pitcher in the Atlanta Braves organization — before a shoulder injury forced him to change paths. He also played football and hockey so with teaching already in the back of his mind, a career in physical education became a natural choice.

Mike Feasby, a Stouffville

resident and head of physical education at Markham District High School, had Mr. Nugent as a teacher at Stouffville Secondary.

"He was a nice guy," Mr. Feasby said of Nugent, who taught him in physical education and math classes. "We knew he was a sporty type of guy because he played a lot of sports."

When Mr. Feasby started teaching at Markham High and got involved with the junior and senior football programs, he would annually face rival teams from Woodbridge College that were coached by Mr. Nugent.

"He was like all of us in that he wanted to win. But off the field he had a quiet disposition," he said.

The pair later played slo-pitch together in Stouffville.

"He's a happy-go-lucky guy. He's just a fun guy to hang around with," Mr. Feasby said.

Most distressing to him is what he perceives to be a declining interest in sports and other extra-curricular activities, at least in Woodbridge.

"There seems to be a general malaise," he says.

A demographic shift in the student population has also meant that perennial favourite sports such as football and volleyball are in decline, while new sports such as cricket draw students' attention. In general, he has seen less interest in the kind of leadership qualities upon which the athletic program usually thrives.

"It's the nature of the

beast," he says. "Definitely the commitment, the sense of responsibility are not there."

Turnout is down among parents, too, and in talking with other teachers, he has seen the problem is not confined to athletics nor to his school.

Relaxed standards for stu-

dents are creating a negative atmosphere he hopes will not persist.

"I find myself wondering what it's going to be like in 10 years," he says.

With 42 years of teaching under his belt he also knows trends are cyclical and he hopes this one may yet turn around.

In the meantime, he is looking forward to some time off with his family including three daughters and five grandchildren.

But despite all the fun he has had, no one is going to have to wrestle the whistle away from coach Nugent. He is ready to move on.

"It's time to go," he says.

The sports person award is sponsored by the Stouffville Sun-Tribune.

The selection committee included former recipients Cliff Dunkeld and Mayor Wayne Emmerson and Sun-Tribune editor Jim Mason.

With files from from Mike Hayakawa and David Fleischer

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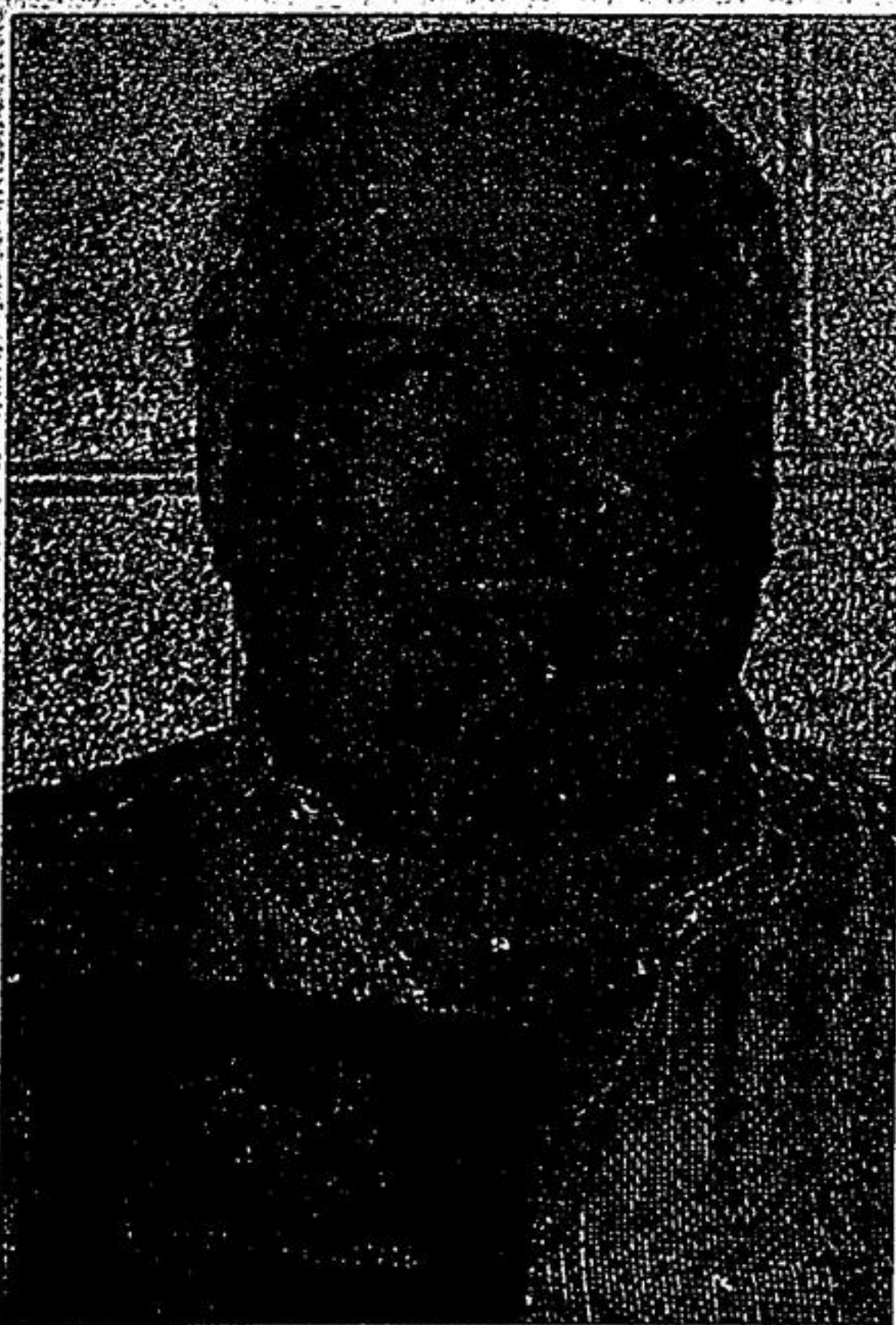
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Former Stouffville District Secondary School teacher and Stouffville Buttermaker Wayne Nugent is Whitchurch-Stouffville's sports person of the year. The award, sponsored by The Sun-Tribune, will be presented at the Strawberry Festival Thursday night.



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