

RECREATION: Drop the beer and chicken wings, pucksters

Adult hockey players taking hearty risks

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

It's my life and I'll do what I want. That's the view of many middle-aged or older players who are in recreational hockey for some exercise and a few laughs.

Still, there's always a risk that can even be life-threatening.

There isn't a year that goes by when at least one participant suffers sudden cardiac arrest on the ice.

Bearing this out was an article pertaining to coronary risk factors and patterns of physical activity in adult male recreational hockey players published by the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* in 2006.

The article cited a high proportion of players reported coronary risk factors and many could be at high risk of sudden cardiac death from coronary artery disease.

Surveying 916 male hockey players with an average age of 45 from five randomly selected arenas in the Ottawa area, close to 60 per cent of respondents reported the presence of two or more coronary risk factors; 67 per cent were overweight; 52 per cent may be described as sedentary and 25 per cent reported hyperlipidemia (including high cholesterol).

Players 55 or older had significantly higher levels of three or more coronary risk factors.

Craig Deasley, a 44-year-old Aurora resident who is president of the Newmarket Old Guys Hockey League, recalled witnessing a fellow player collapsing and dying in his skates ...

Although the study took place in Ottawa, such incidents aren't uncommon within the boundaries of York Region.

Craig Deasley, a 44-year-old Aurora resident who is president of the Newmarket Old Guys Hockey League, recalled witnessing a fellow player collapsing and dying in his skates in another league.

"It was pretty ugly. The guy was turning blue and purple," he said.

"But what amazed me was when the paramedics showed up, it appeared they showed no urgency. The reality was that once a player hits the ground, they're dead."

Is it worth the risk?

Yes, says Stephen Forsey, secretary-treasurer and a participant in the 50 and over division of the York Oldtimers Hockey League.

"The socializing is important," he said. "Especially the camaraderie that takes place.

The exercise is a side benefit."

Even physicians agree.

Dr. James Carson, a Unionville family doctor and a former recreational player, was quick to note physical inactivity is actually more of a risk factor among middle-aged individuals.

"For men and women, being involved in some form of physical activity can be fun and safe if they use the right protective equipment. It can be a great social activity," he said. "We shouldn't discourage people from participating in sports. Hockey, for example, is a great sport for older athletes and it's usually a safe sport."

It's up to each participant to realize the potential risks.

STOUFFVILLE LEAGUE

"I don't think individuals for the most part do anything more or less to prepare for the upcoming hockey season," said Brent Stachel, Stouffville Amateur Hockey League president and a player for 28 years. "It's their lifestyle. Some are in very good to excellent physical condition and some aren't. They just go at it when the first puck drops."

"We have some players who play in a number of leagues and we have some players who are slightly overweight and that's a risk," Forsey said of his league, which has 420 participants from all over York Region who compete in four age groups.

"We hope the players would have a full year regimen of regular exercise."

Forsey devotes more of his offseason to pre-conditioning, especially in late summer.

"I spend my time on a bike and do some running in August and early September just before our season starts," he said.

Deasley's league is in its fourth season and draws players age 35 to 63 from many walks of life in Aurora and Newmarket. "Maybe for about half of the players this is their only hard activity a week," he said, "while others might play a couple of times a week."

The high cost of ice hurts, he said.

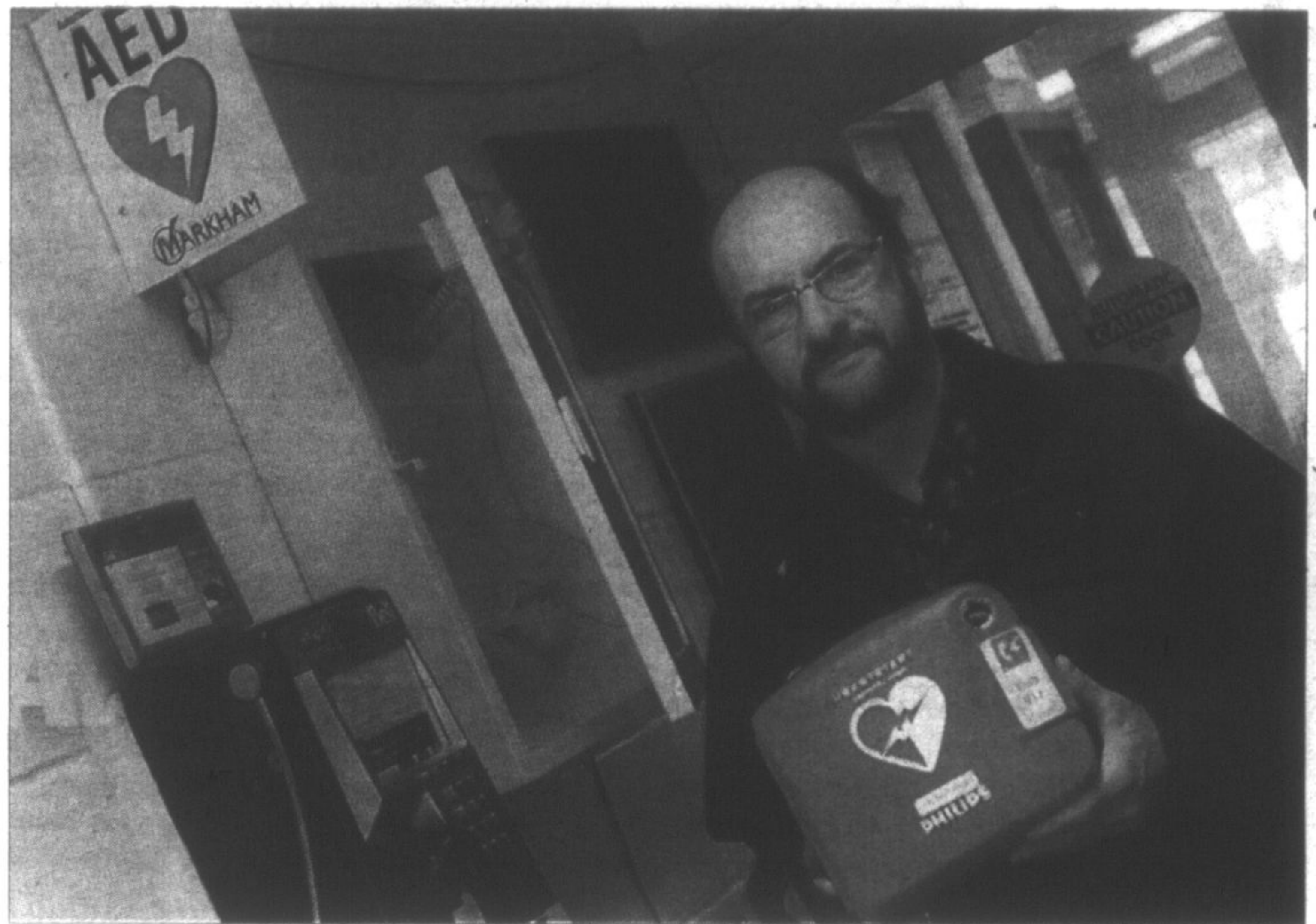
"You have to remember that ice time is so expensive and if you factor in the cost for referees and timekeeper, sweaters and insurance, it works out to about \$5 a minute for the cost to rent the ice," Deasley said.

"There's little or no time for players to get in a leisurely warm-up or even to stretch."

That's why players are encouraged to loosen up and get warm in the hallways or dressing room before the game starts.

"It sure is expensive to do it properly," he said.

As for after the game, Dr. Carson warns against consuming alcoholic beverages and wings – a postgame ritual for many – especially for those who experience a shortness of breath during activities or if a history of heart disease exists in their family.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Dr. James Carson says hockey players and officials should learn how to use a defibrillator like this one at Crosby Arena in Unionville. They should also talk to their doctor before playing.

He is chairperson of publication and selection committees for the Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine and is on the staff for the Sport Safety Committee.

One of the safest approaches, he suggested, is to consult with a family physician before the start of a new season.

While some players might have a notion it could be more advantageous to play in an older age group where less physical exertion might be required, Dr. Carson, who once played in the Markham Men's Recreational and Unionville Men's Hockey leagues, said such shortcuts don't work.

"Players generally try as hard as they feel up to and some older league players are much faster than some players in the younger divisions," he said.

In the hope of saving lives when such incidents occur on the ice, Dr. Carson strongly suggested all participants should take the time to learn how to utilize life-saving devices such as automated external defibrillators (AED) that are now in most hockey rinks.

In Stouffville, where players have also suffered on-ice heart problems, Stachel noted some players have some familiarity with how defibrillators work. Unfortunately, not enough.

Dr. Carson said operating defibrillators is easy and can be done by taking basic life support courses offered in most towns. "All hockey coaches, town employees and parents should learn how to use them," he said.

Sheri Krauss, a Town of Markham spokesperson, noted anyone can learn how defibrillators operate through a public access program instituted this summer.

Generated largely through the Chase McEachern Act, which in 2007 was passed to allow the public to use defibrillators on victims without being certified, the two-hour course is offered four times a year as a public training service.

"It gives each person an idea about AEDs and where the units are located in a building and then they get to try them out," she said.

Krauss said further information on the course can be found on the town's website or by calling the Town of Markham.

TOWNS CHIP IN

Citing they have 13 public access AED machines in their facilities throughout town, Micol Ongman, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's manager of recreation, said they also offer programs to the public.

"We have trainer units and offer training to groups wanting to learn, we have the trainers at community events with staff showing the public how they work and offer training to our community centre user groups that have a public access machine," she said.

"Heart disease is out there," Dr. Carson warned. "It's a complex issue and there are people who will die. The numbers that do though can be reduced by people paying attention to coronary diseases."

Need Cash! Bring unwanted Jewelry - Get Instant Cash

GRAND OPENING SPECIAL!

Receive **10%** More With This Coupon

GOLD BUYERS

Stouffville Country Market, Booth 020, Stouffville, 1-877-503-3957