

Have glove, will travel

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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Ron Thompson estimates he plays in close to 100 slo-pitch games in a season.

The Stouffville resident said a good number of those contests are played within the Greater Toronto Area with a team called the Rockin 50s.

But when an opportunity arises to utilize his glove and bat south of the border, Thompson's enthusiasm heightens considerably.

Playing all positions except pitcher whenever he's on the ball diamond, Thompson was doing just that this week with a competitive men's team he's been with for the last four seasons, StefcO, during a slo-pitch junket to Mesquite, Nev.

That event was staged as a tuneup before the short trek to St. George, Utah, where the club is participating in the Huntsman World Senior Games, which conclude this weekend.

With teams from all over North America on hand, Thompson and his Scarborough-based StefcO team are no strangers to the competition having been in it four times.

They won a championship title two years ago in the 50-55 age group division.

This year though, they are making their debut in the 55-60 grouping.

The Huntsman World Senior Games, which attracts some 10,000 athletes from around the world participating in a variety of sports, run over a two-week timeframe.

"It's a phenomenal event," he said. "It serves as a means to encourage physical fitness for people 50 and over."

"There's a lot of aging athletes who are making the most of it!"

Being a veteran of these games, Thompson said what impresses him foremost is how they are organized.

Particularly the manner in which an attempt is made to seed teams based on how competitive they are.

Not to mention the weather and playing facilities, which he described as first class.

"Any team can enter the games, but the (slo-pitch convenors) try to figure out your calibre," he said from his past experiences.

"Because there's so many teams that enter and if some of the play-

ers on the teams have played competitive ball they try to rate your team to see if you are at the top, which is major and down the line to competitive, AAA, AA, A, B or C.

'You're with the Americans and they know the game. You try to go in with a good approach and try to learn to refine your skills and have a good time as well.'

"They're keen on having a level playing field."

What intrigues Thompson when competing against the U.S.-based teams is the idea there's always something new to learn about the game.

Especially since teams from southerly locations have the luxury of playing the game almost year round.

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to go in with a good approach and try to learn to refine your skills and have a good time as well."

As for how the StefcO team will do this year, Thompson said if they play well, they might have a chance at bringing home another title.

"The games are meant to be fun and competitive and be a great experience," he said.

Upon conclusion of the games, Thompson said their team will conclude their junket by playing in another event in Phoenix from Oct. 21 to 23 before returning north of the 49th parallel.

With Thompson's slo-pitch season coming to an end after his west coast foray, he won't sit idly by waiting for the snow to melt before returning to the diamond.

Three times a week, he plays recreational hockey.

"It's a way to keep life interesting," Thompson, owner of a software company when he's not playing slo-pitch or hockey, said with a laugh. "You need something physical to do. Sports is healthy and it creates a good attitude towards learning and it's fun."

Spirit players shooting for scholarships at Showcase

When the Stouffville Spirit take to the ice today for a scheduled Ontario Junior Hockey League contest against the Huntsville Otters in Cobourg at 4:30 p.m. it will be an important one.

Not just from a team perspective as the Spirit hopes to keep pace with the rival Newmarket Hurricanes atop the North Division.

But with the contest being a part of the league's Governor's Showcase weekend, players on the Spirit roster will want to make a positive impression on the large number of U.S. college coaches in the stands.

Having played collegiate hockey at Cornell University from 1984-88, Spirit head coach Craig Donovan knows full well the significance of this contest for players on his team who have aspirations of earning a coveted National Collegiate Athletic Association Division One scholarship.

"For a lot of guys on our team it's their ambition to play college hockey," Donovan said. "It's a chance to show the coaches they should be watching them."

"For veteran guys on our team, like Chris Porter, right down to the young guys, it gives them a chance to make a name for themselves and to get on the school's radar."

Along with trying to showcase his players, Donovan said the game is important for his club as it hopes to rebound from a 5-4 overtime loss to the visiting Orangeville Flyers Thursday.

The Spirit earned one point from the game, thanks to a last second power-play goal by defenceman Paul Geiger with goaltender Knick Dawe pulled. Alex Botten, Kory Kennedy and Porter had the other Spirit goals.

After today's game, the Spirit are next scheduled to host the Aurora Tigers at the Stouffville Arena Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

-Michael Hayakawa

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