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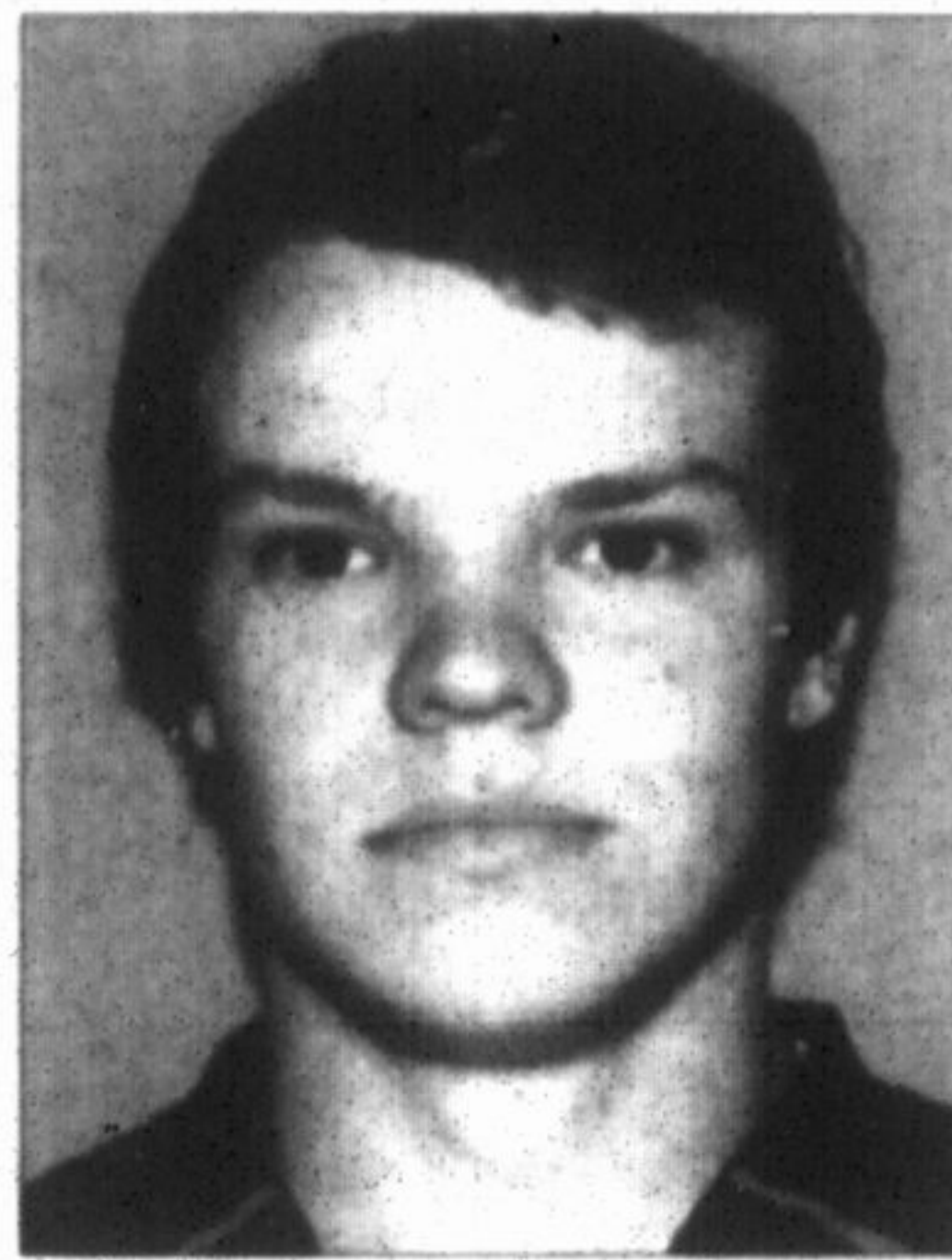
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SPIRIT

Porter plans to keep defying hockey odds

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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CHRIS PORTER: Converted defenceman made jump from midget A Clippers to Spirit Jr. A club.

If you think it's impossible for a minor hockey player who competes at the midget A level to make the jump to the Ontario Junior Hockey League, don't tell Chris Porter.

The 20-year-old Stouffville resident who is in his third season with the Stouffville Spirit is proof that making such a huge competitive leap can be accomplished.

But, the six-foot, three-inch, 204-pound forward was quick to acknowledge it's not easy.

What's required, he warned, is plenty of hard work.

After graduating from the midget Stouffville Clippers, Porter earned a berth on the Spirit as a gangly, six-foot, fourth-line player three seasons ago.

Since that time though, Porter has sprouted three inches and added 40 pounds of muscle.

That's enabled him to be one of the club's top players and its second-leading scorer, with 15 goals and 18 assists in 23 games, good for 10th in the league's scoring race through Wednesday.

"I knew I could play Jr. A hockey," Porter said. "But to do it I knew that I had to work hard, take no time off when the season ended. You always have to do it."

To that, Porter was quick to

credit an offseason conditioning program he's undertaken for the last three years under the supervision of Spirit conditioning coach Randy Smith at his Bodysmith gym in Gormley.

Part of his training regimen included outdoor cardiovascular work twice a week and three days in the gymnasium.

As well, Porter said he would take to the ice at least once a week.

Another big turning point came during his high school days at

St. Brother Andre Catholic High School in Markham.

Playing for the Cardinals' senior hockey team under coaches Dave Turner and Paul Titanic, the defenceman was converted to forward.

"(Turner and Titanic) realized I could be a forward and made the call," Porter recalled. "But it was something I wanted to try and I enjoyed it."

Having played on defence helped immensely in making Porter a better two-way player.

"When you play on defence it's more of a thinking thing whereas when you play forward it's more of a skating thing," he explained.

Being in the league for three years has also been beneficial for Porter, who now serves as one of the Spirit's senior leaders.

"When you're in your first year you're sort of feeling things out in the league. In my second year I started to move up to where I'm now more confident and that helps," he said.

Spirit head coach Craig Donovan was quick to acknowledge Porter is one of the great feelgood stories on the team.

"He's certainly one of the most improved players on our team over his junior career and he's definitely transformed himself over the last

SPIRIT RIGHT AT HOME

The Stouffville Spirit hosts the Newmarket Hurricanes tomorrow at 2:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Arena

40 months," Donovan said. "He's gone from being a guy who first started as a weak skater to being a powerful skater now who can skate by guys."

"He should be proud of what he's accomplished and, as a coach, you like to see players who want to get better. Chris is a great example of that."

Personal goals include 75 points in this, his final season, and a chance to play at the collegiate level next year.

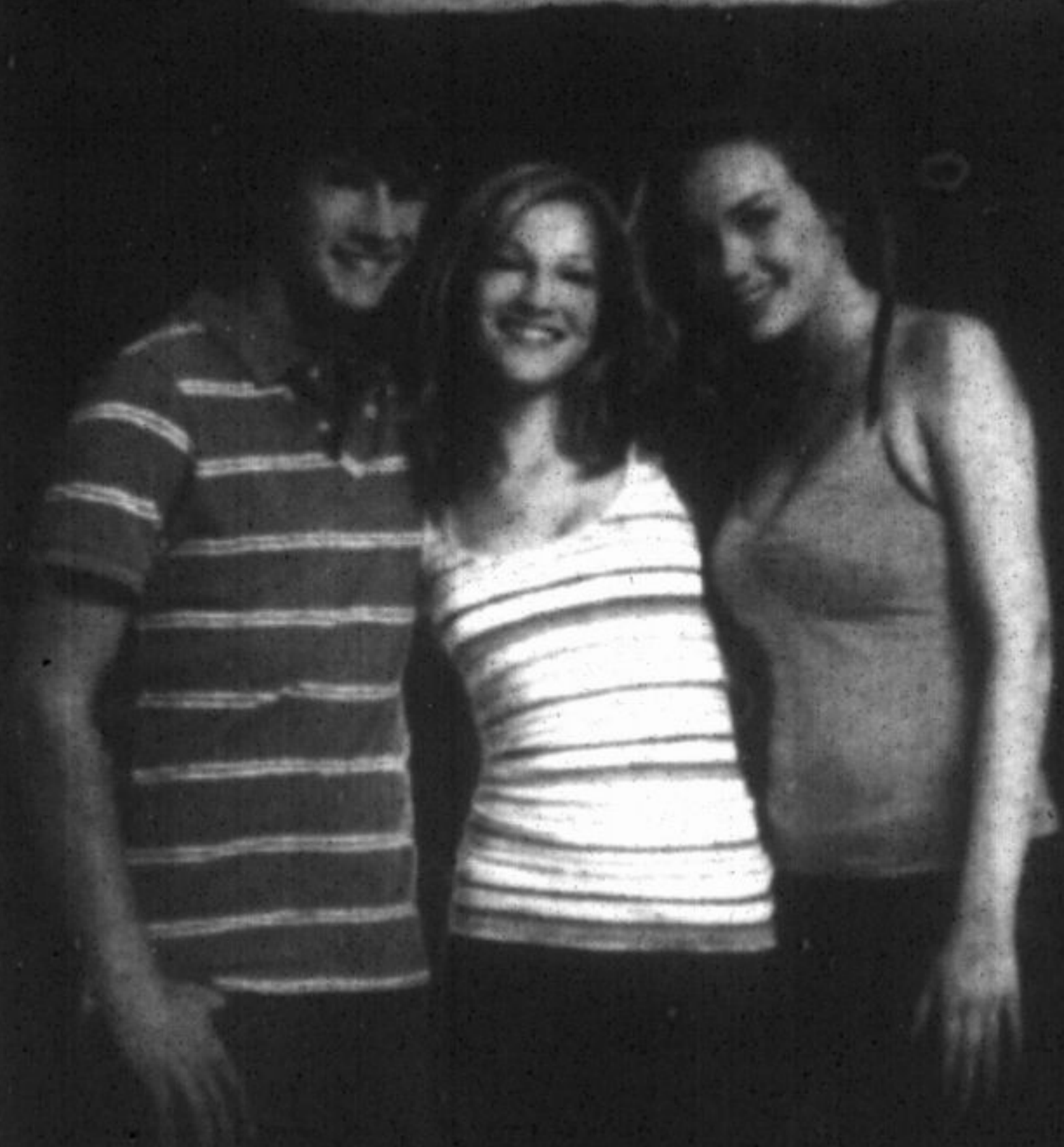
To date, Porter, who has taken part-time courses during the last two years at UOIT in Oshawa, said he's had exploratory discussions with U.S. schools.

From a team perspective, Porter hopes the team can take things one step further from last season in which they reached the league semifinals.

Porter sees no reason why the team can't do it.

"Hopefully we can click like last year at the same time and get to the finals," he said.

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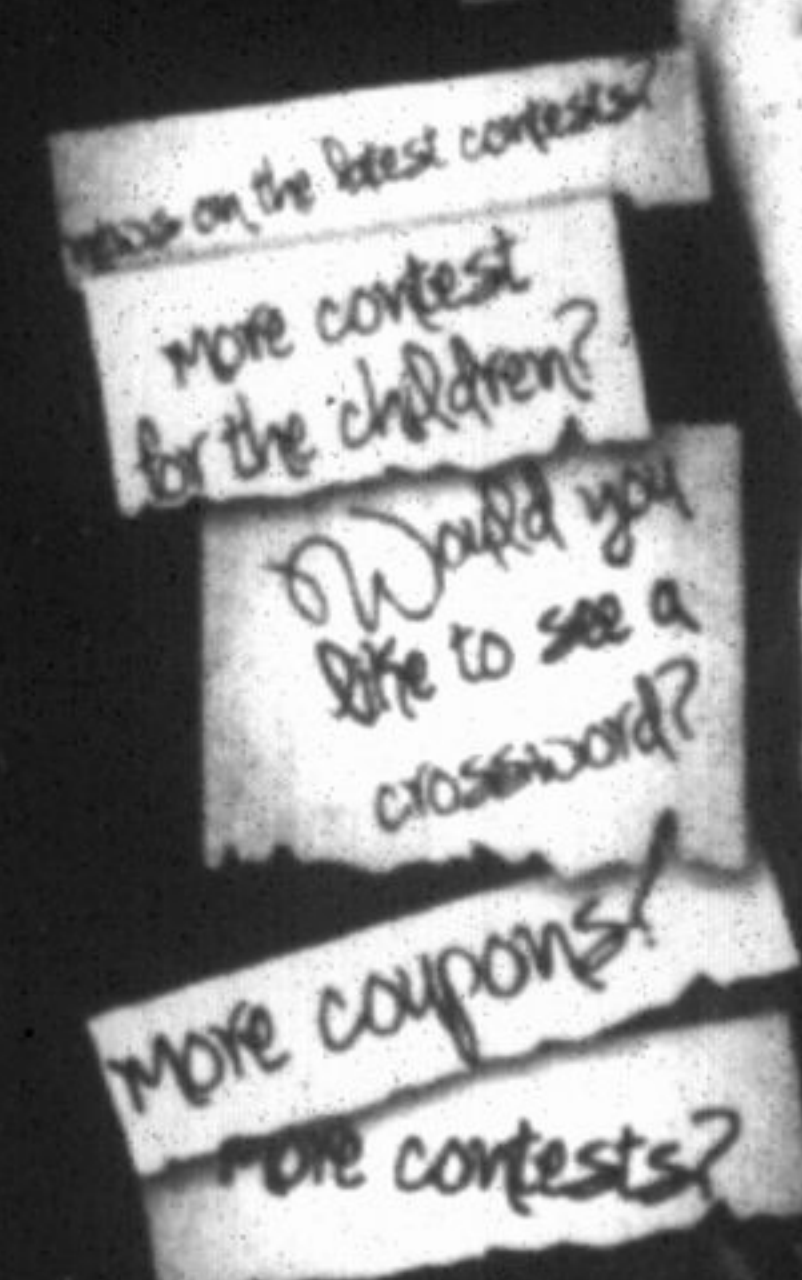
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