



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Stouffville Spirit forward Peyton Backus tries to shake off Pickering Panthers forward Brodie Tutton during OJHL action at the Stouffville Arena Thursday. The Spirit lost 5-3.

Clippers shooting for OMHA titles

Stouffville Clipper teams are staying alive in the Ontario Minor Hockey Association playdowns.

Only one of nine Clipper squads that qualified for the provincial playdowns has been eliminated.

Under a York Simcoe Minor Hockey League

pilot project, fewer teams are playing for the big prize of an OMHA, or possibly Ontario Hockey Federation championship this minor hockey season.

It reduced the number of OMHA qualifiers to four per category from eight.

The rest of the teams play for York Simcoe titles.

For playoff schedules, go to ysmhl.net and omha.net

Spirit playoff hopes take another hit

The Pickering Panthers had lost 11 Ontario Junior Hockey League games in a row.

Only the Hamilton Red Wings have a poorer record in the 22-team league.

The last place team in the North Conference hadn't tasted victory in more than a month — Jan. 4 when it beat the Stouffville Spirit 4-2.

Until Thursday, that is, and a return date with the Spirit, the team that sits one spot ahead of them in standings.

The Panthers put a large dent in the Spirit's already-iffy playoff hopes with a 5-3 win at the Stouffville Arena.

Pickering goalie Conor Barrie, who has played Jr. A in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, was rock solid if not spectacular.

He was certainly busy, as his team was

outshot 59-24, including 42-8 through two periods. Throw in a handful of Spirit shots that found iron and you've got an all-out onslaught.

Marc Stevens, Corey Derosé and Nathanael Halbert scored for the Spirit, which led 2-1 after one period and was tied 3-3 after a pair.

The Panthers celebrated the win like they had won a playoff round, whooping it up with Barrie in his crease.

The Spirit trails the Cobourg Cougars by eight points for the final playoff spot in the North-East Conference. Each team has five games remaining, including a head-to-head match-up Monday in Cobourg. The Spirit's next game is in Wellington Sunday.

— Jim Mason

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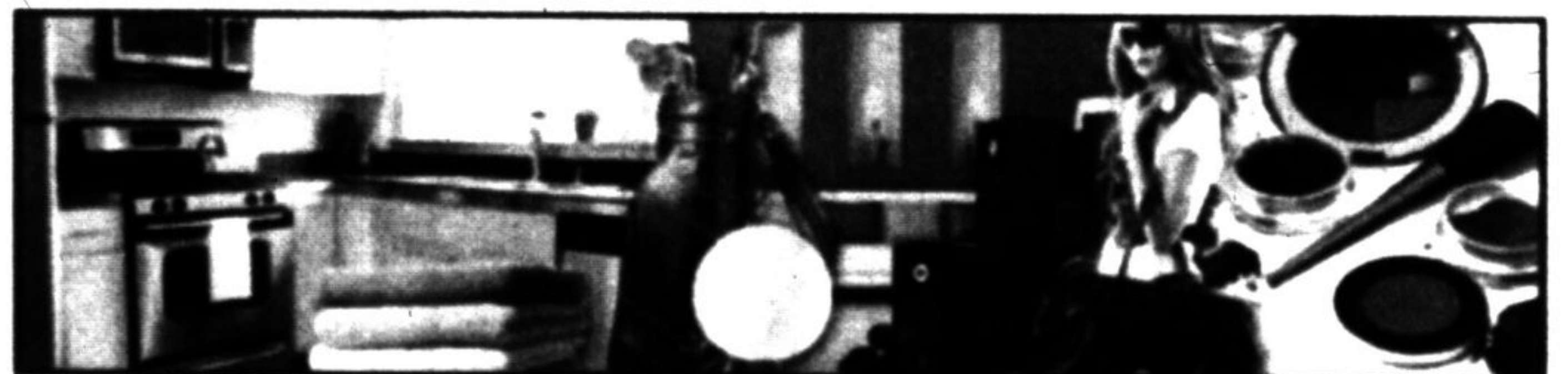
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