

GAME ON

By Jay A. Meiliunas



Spring has definitely Sprung. With the nice weather finally here, hockey, skiing and snowboarding are behind us for another year, lacrosse is under way and the baseball diamonds and soccer pitches will soon be full of activity. Isn't it great to see the kids playing in our parks, families taking the time for early evening bike rides together, and couples taking weekend strolls through town?

During a recent conversation with my wife, Tamara, about setting aside time for our various family activities, organizing our boys' many sporting events, team schedules and summer camp registrations, and planning an activity based summer vacation, I wondered if our boys were over-involved. Surely I am not the only parent that has felt like a glorified cab driver at times.

I asked Tamara and she agreed there are times when too much activity can result in such a feeling, but we looked at the flip side of the coin. We evaluated the physical activity our boys would get if we pulled them out of their after school activities. What we found was astonishing. It was clear that our school curriculums have all but eliminated phys. ed. from their programming. Do you know that we are lucky if our children are physically active for two to three hours a week? And in the high schools it's worse; phys. ed has become an elective.

In a society where the average child is likely to spend five to ten times longer behind a computer and/or video game console than being physically active, is it

any wonder the child obesity rate is going through the roof, that the rate of early on-set diabetes is on the rise, and that doctors' offices are full of brochures on Ritalin and articles on ADHD?

Our children need exercise, and they need us to make sure it happens. We must set an example by ensuring we make the time for family activities. And we need to take the time to register our kids and get them out to various activities. Let's align our eating habits with our dietary needs, in spite of our busy schedules and the convenience of fast food.

Let's face it, we can make any activity enjoyable, as it is almost always a great experience once we are there. And we are left with lasting memories, an increased level of physical fitness and, most times, terrific stories to tell. I have started to practise what I preach. So I challenge you to get out there, spend time together, make memories and 'Beat the Feet'.

For information on outdoor hiking or events, visit www.region.york.on.ca, or call 1-877-464-9675 for a copy of the Take a Hike - Recreation Trails of York Region booklet and the Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest. You can contact me at stouffville.sports@rogers.com and thanks again to those of you who send in your thoughts, stories and comments. I truly value your feedback.

Until next month, play hard!

this SPORTING LIFE

By John Hopkins

Alfons Rubbens can see a soccer revival coming to the Whitchurch-Stouffville area, and he should know.

The 73-year-old community resident has been a key player on the local soccer scene for almost 40 years. He founded the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club in 1977 and guided it through its early years, and he is currently publisher and editor of Inside Soccer magazine, a publication he launched in 1992 that now enjoys a national profile.

According to Rubbens, the game has gone through a dry spell over the last couple of years, not just in the Whitchurch-Stouffville area but across Canada. "The World Cup in the U.S. [in 1994], really boosted the levels [of participation]," he said, "but it has not grown in the last two years. There is nothing sustaining it in Canada at the moment. There is no pro league. There is a lot lacking at the top."

"The numbers are still there overall. But it stops once they reach 14 or 15." Rubbens said this summer's World Cup should provide a boost to interest in the game, but also sees next year's Under-20 World Championships, which will be hosted by Canada, as a critical opportunity to generate interest in the sport. A new stadium is due to be built in Toronto in conjunction with the Under-20 event.

Rubbens, a native of Holland, started the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club for very practical reasons. "When my son

STILL IN THE GAME

and daughter started playing I had to take them to Aurora," he explained. "Then I would take their friends, and soon I was driving seven kids to soccer games in Aurora. I thought 'This is crazy.'"

So with a \$3,000 grant from the town for equipment and uniforms, Rubbens started the Whitchurch-Stouffville club. One-hundred and forty-six players registered for that first season and 10 teams were formed.

The club plays its games at the Casey van Maris Soccer Centre in Ballantrae Park. The centre was dedicated to the late van Maris, a former president of the club, on Sept. 21, 2002. Rubbens says the club enjoyed a great deal of support over the first 10 years, but admits that such enthusiasm has been hard to come by more recently. It is a phenomenon he thinks isn't restricted to soccer or to the Whitchurch-Stouffville area.

"In those days [when the club started] it was very easy to get enthusiastic parents and volunteers," explained Rubbens, who took two Stouffville teams to Europe in his time with the club. "But there's a lack of volunteers now, and I mean volunteers with a passion. Parents are not involved in the game anymore. They are so busy now. I think it's the same with baseball."

"It's such a pity. We used to have so much fun. There was so much unity and it was a wonderful time."

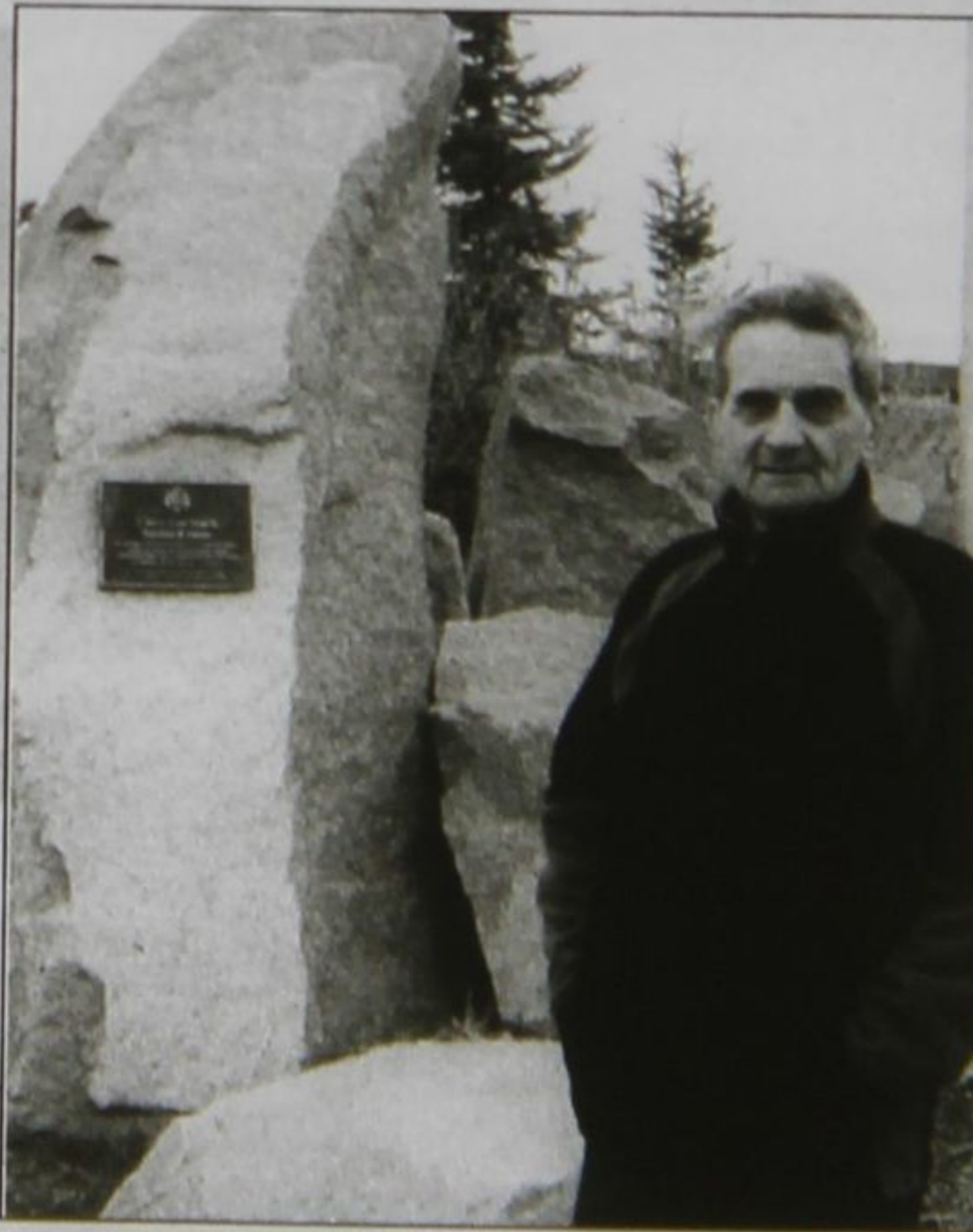
Rubbens started publishing Inside Soccer when he retired and says the publication has become a great success.

"It's become a major thing," he said. "I'm the only one who publishes a magazine in Canada, and the contacts I've made throughout North America, and the friends I've made, are wonderful."

Currently the magazine, which is published every two months, is focusing on specific themes geared to promoting the game among young players. The April issue included a Tournament and Camp Guide, while the next edition will feature a parents' guide to soccer.

It is all part of Rubbens' continuing efforts to grow the game in his community and across the country. "I wouldn't be surprised if we get another kick at it," he said when looking ahead to the next couple of years.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we see registrations in Stouffville start to grow again."



Alfons Rubbens takes a break at the Casey van Maris Soccer Centre in Ballantrae Park. He is standing next to the plaque dedicating the centre to van Maris, a former president of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club.

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