

Hockey night in Stouffville an affair filled with Spirit

By John Hopkins

Special to Stouffville This Month

"Go Spirit go!"

I'm hooked. Sign me up for season tickets. Where can I buy an authentic J.D. Smithson jersey? I have become a bona fide fan of the Stouffville Spirit, Northern Conference finalists in last season's OHA Provincial Junior A playoffs. I don't know when it all started, but the final nail in this diehard Spirit fan's coffin came at Game 6 of the semi-final playoff series against Newmarket.

There I was, cheering myself hoarse at every twist of a dramatic game. Stouffville lost the contest in overtime but won the series the following night in Newmarket. Somewhere in that critical 24 hours the seeds of fanatical support were sown.

When my wife and I moved to Stouffville we looked forward to the camaraderie of a small community. We support local businesses, volunteer at the library sale and take part in the Terry Fox Run.

But I'm a traditional Canadian boy at heart, and it didn't take me long to realize there was some pretty serious hockey here. Heck, the sign on the way into town advertises Stouffville as "Home of the Spirit" and Thursday Night Hockey is promoted throughout the town all winter.

Ever since we arrived I thought we should get out to a game. We did go to last season's home opener, which featured all the pomp and ceremony of a visit from the Queen - a marching band, red carpet at centre ice and the mayor conducting the ceremonial opening face-off.

But after that the routine of fall and winter took over. Before I knew it we were into February, and there was a sign at the Stouffville Arena promoting the playoffs. Well, I thought, it would be nice to see the team play once more before the season ended.

I almost missed my chance. Within a flash



Team shows community spirit on and off the ice: players from the Stouffville Spirit raised \$1,070 at the second annual Terry Fox Car Wash at Houston Ford Sept. 13. Here they can be seen giving the full treatment to editor Kate Gilderdale's pride and joy, Basil II.

Stouffville swept Couchiching out of the opening round and it was on to Newmarket and the Northern Conference semi-finals. Then came my opportunity. Game 6 of the series against Newmarket would be held in Stouffville on a Saturday night. Stouffville was leading the series three games to two. One more win and they were through to the finals!

I knew a critical playoff counter would attract a big throng. There were no advanced ticket sales, so I arrived 45 minutes before game time to be sure I wouldn't be disappointed.

Fortunately I was seated with the heartiest Stouffville supporters, as a large gang of Newmarket backers had made the trek east to see this key match. I could probably drive to Newmarket in 20 minutes, but on this night the gulf between our towns might as well have been half the world. This was a cold war on the scale of North America and the Soviet Union at the height of Communism. Or, to use a more apt metaphor, the Maple Leafs and Canadiens in hockey's Original Six era.

It didn't take me long to pick out the Newmarket players I despised as the teams settled into a close fought game. Momentum see-sawed back and forth between the two sides, but after the second period we had a one-goal lead. Then midway through the third period Newmarket tied the game.

I can't count how many times I lived and died through the period and a half of overtime as Newmarket and Stouffville traded scoring chances. Then, disaster. Newmarket scored. The crowd sat in stunned silence, except for that cadre of evil Newmarket fans on the other side of the building. They cheered. I bet they mistreat their pets, I thought.

But there was still game 7 in Newmarket. In the end I resisted the urge to go, relying on the magic of the internet to check the score on Monday morning.

We won! Now it was on

to mighty Aurora and the Northern Conference finals. "Aurora has barely lost a game all year," my wife pointed out. This was going to be tough.

Aurora is closer to Stouffville than Newmarket, but again the gulf in sporting rivalry was huge. I considered myself fortunate not to have any friends in Aurora, as I would obviously have to disown them.

The first setback came when I was looking at the series schedule. I was going to be out of town on business for the first few games. Once again, my computer and modem became my best friends. In lulls between work assignments I furtively dialled up the Stouffville Spirit website to check on progress. On one occasion a colleague caught me. "Looking at hockey scores, eh?" he scoffed.

My civic pride took over. "Don't you realize Stouffville is playing in the Ontario Junior A Northern Conference Finals?" I replied, in the manner a chef might say, "Don't you know you always serve red wine with beef?"

By the time I returned the series was tied 2-2.

Aurora regained the lead in the fifth game, with the sixth to be played in Stouffville on a Sunday afternoon. It appeared I would have a chance to watch more playoff drama unfold live, but a last minute assignment took me out of town.

Maybe we'll get to the next round, I thought wistfully. Sadly, it was not to be. Aurora won the game and the series was over. Was I making too much fuss over a hockey team? After all, there are much more critical events going on in the world.

Stouffville scribes invited to join writers' circle

Calling all amateur and professional writers - Northword Edition is looking for new members.

This friendly local writers' circle meets every other Tuesday evening from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Joseph Gould Room of the Uxbridge Public Library.

Bring a sample of your writing to read and receive constructive critiquing, exchange news on publishing opportunities and contests, or simply listen and enjoy spending time with like-minded artistic souls. The group will meet next on Sept. 30 and every other Tuesday after that. The only cost is \$2 per person per meeting to cover the room rental.

Northword Edition was started six years ago by Durham College creative writing instructor Dorothea Helms, who is also on the board of directors of The Writers' Circle of Durham Region (WCDR). The Uxbridge circle comes under the umbrella of this exciting non-profit organization, which is dedicated to encouraging and promoting the art and skill of writing, fostering literacy, and providing moral support to writers through education and networking, both independently and in co-operation with existing organizations.

For more information on Northword Edition or WCDR, call Dorothea Helms at 905-852-9294.

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"I am committed to making Stouffville an even better place to live. My involvement on a number of town committees has given me insight into the needs of those who call Stouffville home."

If elected councillor in Ward 5, I will support the following:

- F**uture controlled growth with emphasis on maintaining a small town atmosphere
- I**nvestment in the revitalization of the downtown core and expansion of leisure services for our seniors and growing community
- V**alue in establishing a permanent home for the Arts and a Vandalism Prevention Program
- E**nvironmental Preservation

Brenda Lobraico can make a difference as Councillor in Ward 5 on November 10, 2003

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