

## Aurora Grove Griffins are Regional basketball champs



By Jeff Doner

They knew they faced an uphill battle, but the Aurora Grove Public School Griffins junior boys basketball team defeated all who stood in their way to win the Regional Basketball Championship for all of York Region earlier this month.

The big win came against the formidable Wendat Village Hawks from Stouffville, who were undefeated in the tournament that included 12 different area champions.

Even though they were down through the first half of the game, the Griffins changed up their strategy to fight their way back to tie things up, send the game into a nail biting overtime and then come out on top with a 39 ? 35 victory.

?We played good defence and kept the score close,? said coach Mako. ?With just under three minutes left to go in the second half, we were down by seven points and I called a time out and told them to foul from here on in. The boys looked at me funny and said, ?on purpose??"

With being such a young team, the Griffins weren't accustomed to fouling to gain possession, but the team bought in immediately and worked it to their advantage.

?They were a little nervous for the final game, but I just said, ?look, we made it here and do the best that you can and we'll go from there',? coach Mako said.

?They were excited to get to the final game, but they were also trying to be realistic because they had watched Wendat play and we saw what we would have to key in on. They had a really strong team and they came in very confident and we stayed with them.?"

On route to the finals, the Griffins also defeated WJ Watson Public School from Keswick, Clearmeadow Public School in Newmarket, Beverly Acres Public School from Richmond Hill and Johnsville Village Public School from Markham.

Just three players had previously played basketball at a high level prior to the short season that only saw the team play three games before the regional tournament.

Nonetheless, it was a big leap for the school's junior team ? made of students in grades four, five and six's ? who will be looking to keep improving and protect their title as Regional champions.

Coach Mako, who has an extensive history playing and coaching in the sport, said the team's success this season bodes well for the school's basketball program and said the sport has definitely been gaining traction in York Region.

?What I have seen is positive with the kids coming up with more skills and also court sense,? he said. ?We had a pretty good team, they were easy to coach, but at the same time, the kids were able to pick it up quickly. I normally coach senior, but the level of understanding with them was high. They were able to pick up the plays, adapt and were good listeners.?

Their season may be over for now, but the Griffins will be ready for whatever challenge they face next.