



SPORTS

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THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Leafs dispose of Webb's Islanders in seven

But Milton native makes a big hit in his NHL playoff debut

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Steve Webb had probably hoped to end his birthday in more upbeat fashion.

The Milton native turned 27 Tuesday and no doubt had thoughts of marking the occasion with advancement to the second round as his New York Islanders headed into game seven against the hometown Maple Leafs.

But Toronto rallied from an early deficit to prevail 4-2 and win a last-man standing marathon series that was as physically punishing - and as verbally abrasive - as any in recent memory.

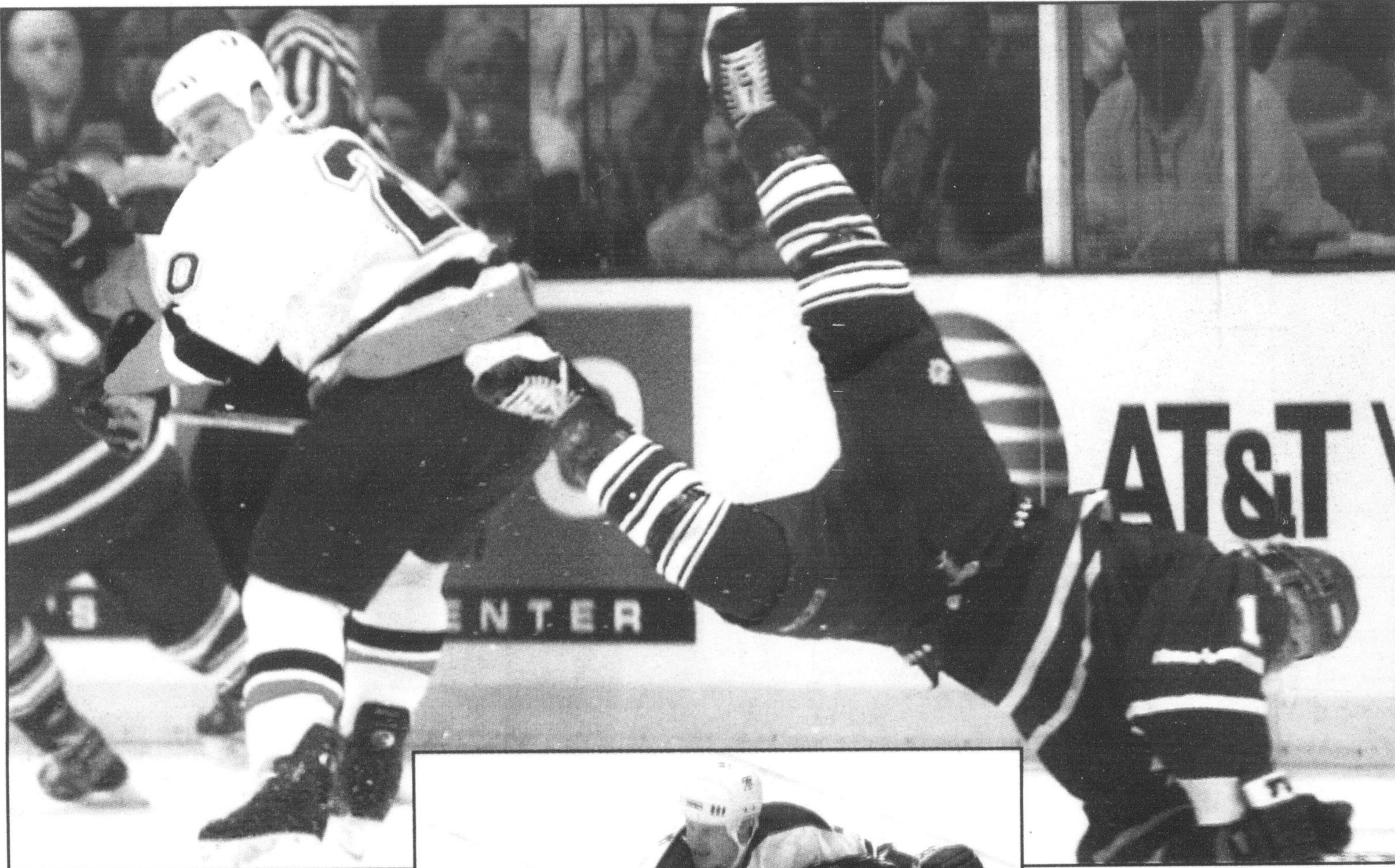
Nevertheless, New York's veteran right winger has to be feeling pretty good about his individual impact against the Leafs. Thriving on hatred from hockey enthusiasts throughout southern Ontario, Webb helped his Long Island mates match muscle with Toronto by landing two dozen hits - including 11 in game three, when the momentum began to swing in New York's favour.

Though an NHL playoff newcomer without any outside expectation to cling to, the hard-hitting forward proved to be a key ingredient in the Islanders' respectable though short-lived run - their first of the post-season in seven years.

Without scoring or fighting, Webb grabbed the attention of fans and opponents alike - stealing some of the spotlight normally reserved for standout marksmen or more well-known disturbers.

Not too shabby for a guy The Sports Forecaster wrote "won't ever play on a regular basis in the NHL" less than a year ago.

That's not exactly an isolated analysis when it comes to the 6-foot, 208-pounder - who follows John Tonelli as a Milton native who went on to play with the Islanders. He lived and played hockey here until he was 12, when his family moved to Peterborough, and has recently bought a



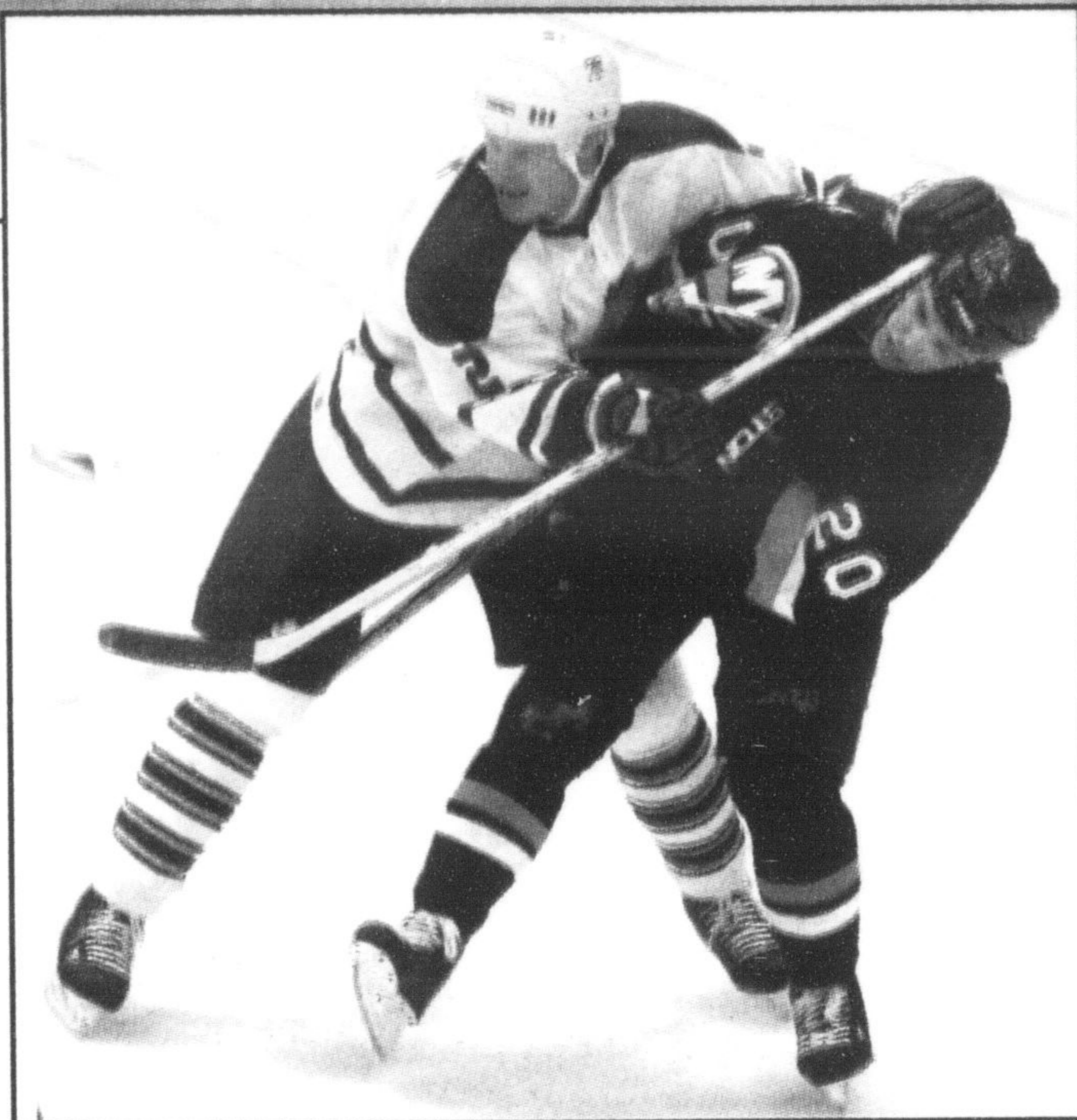
home here in the new Mattamy subdivision.

But continued efforts like those delivered over the past two weeks will go a long way toward making him the kind of beloved enforcer that has brought fellow Peterborough Petes alumnus Tie Domi notoriety and job security in T.O.

And that couldn't come at a better time for Webb - whose contract with the Islanders is up this spring.

But remaining an NHL regular will greatly depend on his success at sidestepping a couple of serious liabilities. While Webb has significantly improved his skating since being picked up by New York six years ago, he continues to be injury-prone and has a tendency to take bad penalties.

But then what hockey bad boy doesn't?



Milton native Steve Webb levels Toronto Maple Leaf Darcy Tucker with a thunderous check during game six in Long Island Sunday. The 6-foot, 208-pound right winger was also on the receiving end of numerous hits during round one, including this game-one shot (at left) by Wade Belak. Webb has struggled to develop with New York in recent years, but a personally-strong showing against Toronto has boosted his chances of resigning with the Islanders and becoming an NHL mainstay.

Photos courtesy of
The Toronto Star

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