

Coach: No truth to trade rumour

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to *The Champion*

The Milton Merchants are spending more time fending off rumours than they are opponents these days.

At Tuesday night's pre-season practice, head coach Marty Williamson dismissed rumblings that resident tough guy Shane Sullivan would be traded.

"I had heard the rumour myself, and was a little surprised. We never had any intention of trading Shane," stressed Williamson. "He's a big part of this team and if he comes focused, he can help out a tonne."

The 20-year-old defenceman said he hadn't heard any rumours about a possible trade, and that he couldn't see why any ever came to light.

He did admit however, that a higher level of discipline and control will be required of him this season — if he hopes to stick it out with the defending league champs.

"I'm going to step it up this year and work on staying out of the

penalty box. I'll need to take a stronger leadership role both on and off the ice," he explained.

The Merchants have signed 16-year-old left winger Nathan Gillis, who last toiled with the Jr. B Winterhawks of Cambridge.

The five-foot ten-inch, 178-pounder — who scored 35 points last season — won himself a spot on the North Bay Centennials' roster last week.

However, when his school package with the major-junior club fell through he opted for Milton.

"Nathan falls somewhere between a Trevor Downey and a Cory Holland. He's a gritty, hard-nosed winger with speed and good hands," said Williamson.

Added Gillis, "This is a great opportunity for me, to come to what looks like a championship team."

It seems local defenceman John Nadalin is set to trade in his AP status for a fulltime spot on the Merchants' blueline.

Williamson said he's been extremely impressed with the young rearguard, who trained with the team during last spring's playoff run and had a strong showing at the Kitchener Rangers' camp recently.

"He'll be more than a regular this year. I'm not sure just what role he'll assume, whether it's penalty killing or the power play, but I have to find John some ice time," Williamson said.

Milton's skipper is also close to signing 17-year-old winger Chad Blundy, who spent last season with the Toronto Marlies of the MTHL.

He likens the Oakville native to a Steve French-type player, with sound defensive skills and good instincts.

Merchant notes: Travis Riffin recently finished up summer roller hockey play and reported to training camp earlier this week ... Mark Cooper continues to nurse an injured shoulder and could be out for the remainder of the pre-season ... Milton hopefuls Jeff Seeds and Mike Wheelihan have survived the first two rounds of cuts ... The Merchants host Hamilton tonight (Friday) at 8 p.m. and travel to Collingwood tomorrow.

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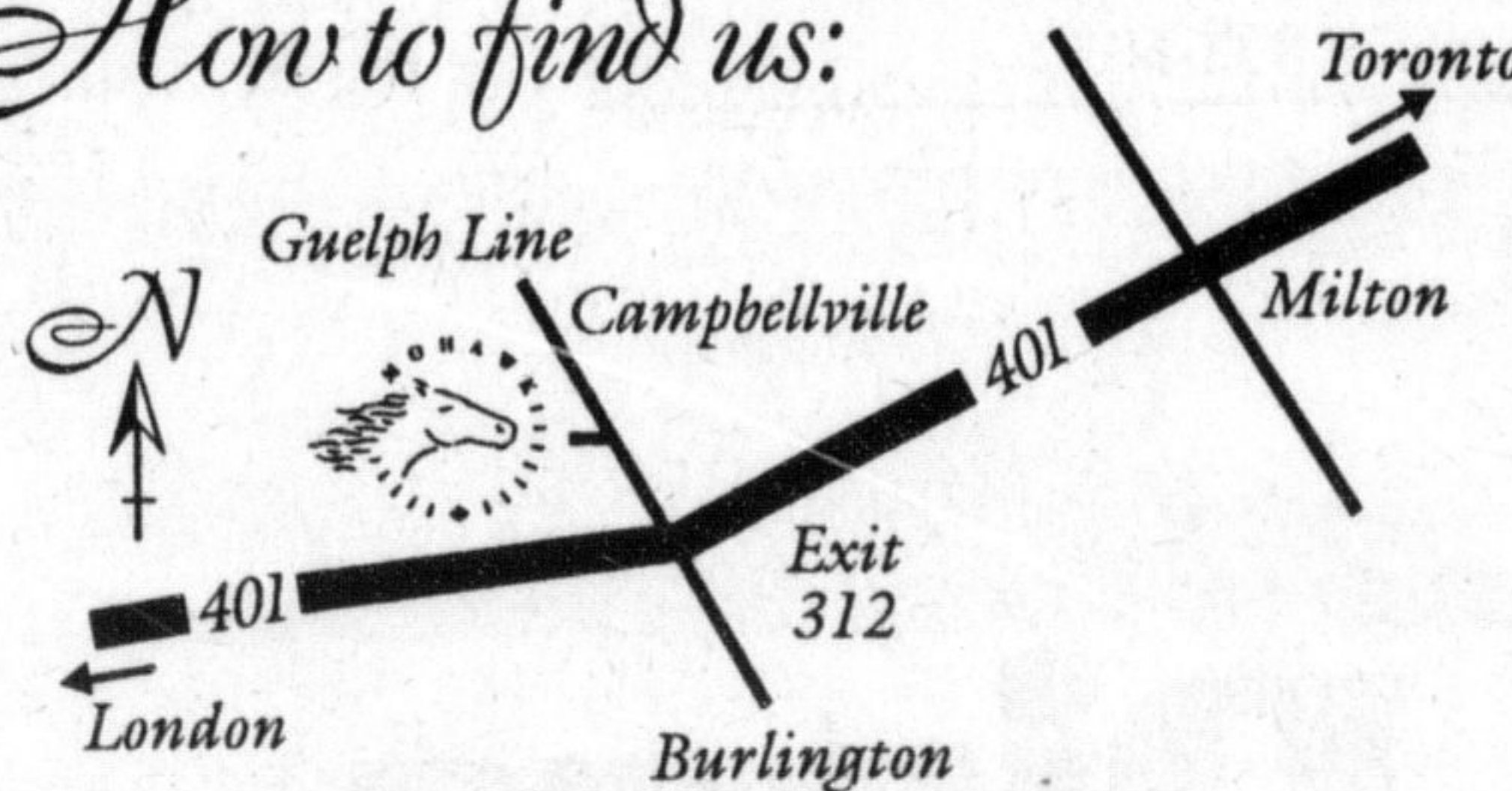
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