



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Merchants are struggling in bone dry spell

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

Our word for the day, boys and girls, is mediocrity — brought to you by the Jr. A Merchants.

Since turning back Rayside-Balfour three weeks ago, Milton has struggled just to keep their heads above water.

They've lost three of their last seven games and haven't beaten an above .500 team over that stretch.

Team president Gregg Carrigan says a lack of motivation is largely to blame for his club's recent woes.

"The one ray of hope though is how we beat Rayside-Balfour, our toughest challenge in the past eight games," he remarked.

"But we still need two wins and a tie to clinch first place and we're not looking like a team that's sniffing out a championship."

Tuesday night the Merchants dropped their seventh game of the season and first to Hamilton, in a 5-4 decision at Mountain Arena.

At a time when they should have all their ducks in a row, in preparation for playoffs, Milton was hampered with a substandard powerplay and terrible defence.

Visiting rearguards were caught up ice half-a-dozen times. The Kilty Bees scored on three of these occasions, twice while shorthanded.

A short-range snapshot by Steve French and wraparound by Kevin Crowe erased an early deficit but two more goals against Daniel Jacques put Hamilton ahead for good.

Even after Bees captain Ed McGrane sank an empty net insurance marker at 19:34 of the third, Merchant coach Marty Williamson refused to

admit defeat.

He called a time out with 20 seconds left and sent out French and captain Jeff Haydar, who had each scored earlier on.

His late showing of faith was rewarded when French popped one in from a goalmouth scramble with six seconds remaining.

A miracle last-second comeback was not to be, as Milton lost a final centre ice draw, but Carrigan admired his skipper's determination.

He stressed, "Absolutely it was the right move. You always keep going right up to the buzzer."

Jacques put a first-period clearing pass right on the waiting stick of Shawn Baltzer, who had only to float a high wrist shot into the visitors' abandoned cage.

The Merchant goalie did settle down after that and stopped 19 of 22 shots over the final two frames.

Counterpart Jamie Bachorski came up with the saves he needed to, but was relatively untested throughout the opening 30 minutes.

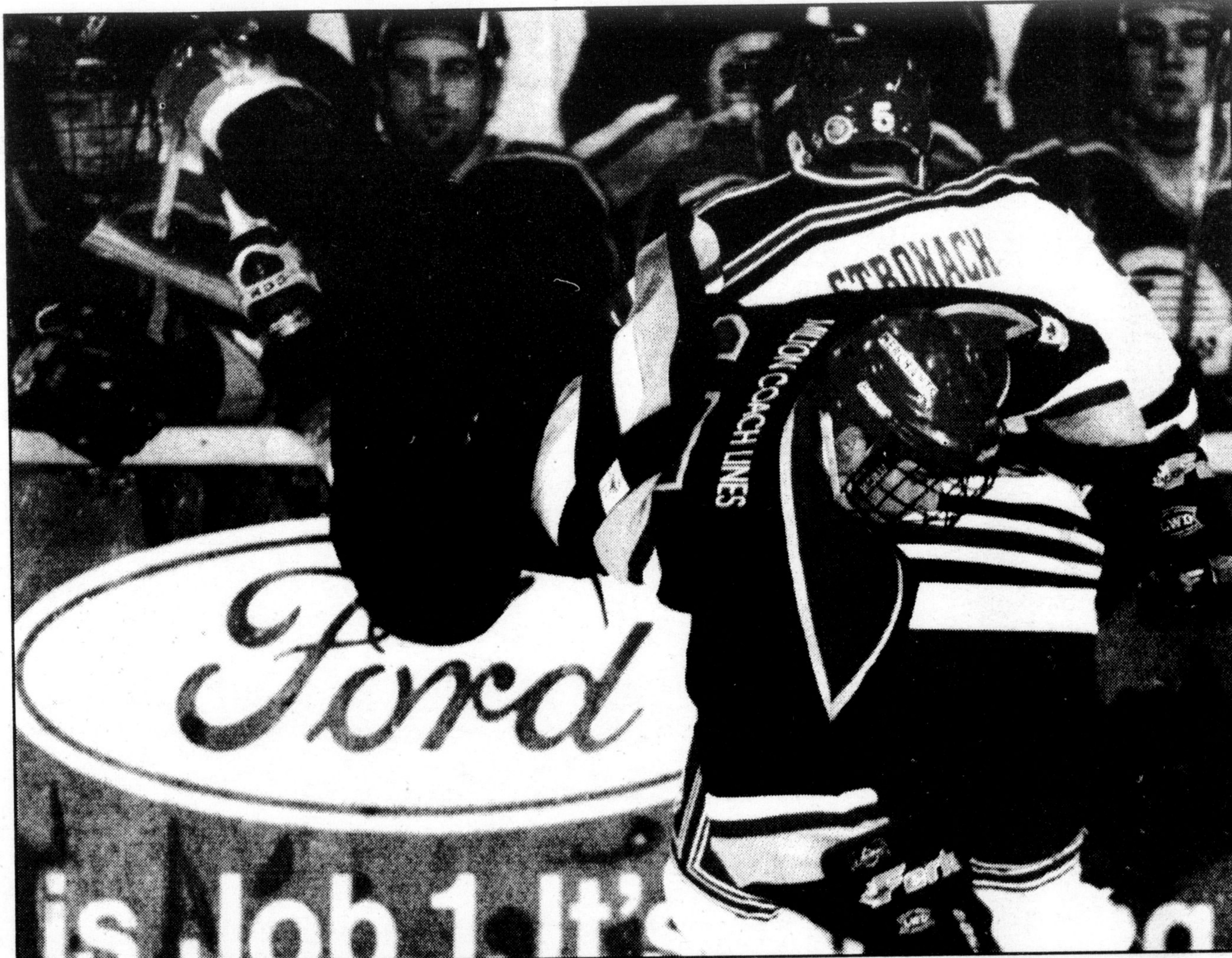
Jeff Haydar carried the banner for his family — with kid brother Darren held scoreless — potting a goal and two assists.

Linemate Ron Baker drew a pair of helpers and upped his point-total to 95.

Scoring for the Bees were Armes with two and Baltzer, McGrane and Marc Gauvreau with singles.

Milton now sits at 39-7-1 and enjoyed a five-point cushion on first place prior to last night's Brampton-Streetsville battle.

Merchant notes: Goalie Jeremy Wentzel is expected back in action this weekend, recovered from knee trouble.



High flying Darren Haydar (airborne against Oakville recently) has piled up points all season and secured a scholarship last week. He will play in New Hampshire.

Photo by PETER THOMPSON

Over one week, it all came together for Darren Haydar

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

The smile said it all.

It was not unlike the one Darren (Mini) Haydar has worn most nights throughout his sophomore season with the Milton Merchants.

Only this particular grin stretched a little wider — just as satisfaction lying behind the 18-year-olds' eyes ran a little deeper.

Saturday evening in Georgetown, number 17 became the Merchants' all-time single season scoring leader — with a five-point performance to move past Jamie Janjevich and his 127-point record.

As was the case when he reached the century mark last month, for the second time in as many seasons, Mini surpassed Janjevich's benchmark with a goal — an upstairs backhand at 7:38 of the first to be precise.

The Provincial League scoring leader isn't 100 per cent sure what's made him so successful this season, but does state that having talented teammates and a higher level of confidence has something to do with it.

His number one fan and number one set-up man have their own theories.

"There's no doubt that he's much stronger this year. He wins more one-on-one battles," said father Frank.

Centering a line with Mini off and on this season, Kevin O'Flaherty has often spoken about the right winger's amazingly quick release — noting "passing is what I do best and there's nobody better to pass to than Darren."

"Because he's so talented his strong work ethic is sometimes overlooked, but is nevertheless another factor (in his success)."

Whatever the reason — or reasons — Mini has bolted into the league's record books in a major way.

With four games remaining he sits second on the all-time goal scorers' list with 65, still enjoying an outside shot at first (75), and ranks seventh in total points with 132.

He's also one of only five players, and the first for Milton, to ever post consecutive 100-point seasons — an accomplishment of which he is most proud.

"I guess it shows my consistency. I think that's the one

• see HAYDAR on page 27



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