

How they won it all

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OHA title on ice.

• Jeremy Wenzel's rags to riches turnaround in game two against Rayside-Balfour. After giving up two goals in the first six minutes of play, the sophomore cager slammed the door in the Sabrecats' faces with an exceptional performance.

• T.J. Lee's game four heroics. He beat Jarrett Rose with a triple overtime winner that put Milton on an emotional high they still haven't come down from. Had things gone the other way, it surely would have been curtains for the Merchants.

• Troy Walczak's game five exorcism at Chelmsford Arena. In the end he did what precious few visitors have been able to in Rayside-Balfour's barn over the last few years — steal a win.

• The endurance of Ron Baker, Matt Bannan and Kevin Crowe. These three Merchants played all 29 playoff games and made big contributions every step of the way. Surprisingly enough after being sidelined for close to a year before joining Milton in December, Crowe turned out to be one of their biggest workhorses.

• Top-notch goaltending. Where Jason Chipman and Lloyd Lafrance bore the brunt of playoff work in the past, Daniel Jacques and Jeremy Wenzel joined forces and caused two months worth of frustration for opposing snipers.

• Darren (Mini) Haydar's scoring flurry. The Provincial League's scoring leader proved himself all over again in post-season play, scoring 50 points, including nine in the All-Ontario finals.

• The leadership of Jeff Haydar, Shane Sullivan, Steve French and Mark McPhail. These rink generals led the way and their faithful charges followed — big time.

• Remarkable fan support. Miltonians followed their hometown heroes near and far, cheering them on to victory in visiting barns as close as Oakville and as far away as Sudbury. A contributing factor to an impressive 13-2 road record.

I'd better leave room for a few more highlights, because if Milton plays like they can in Nanaimo, there's more to come.

Milton wins big one

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6:32 of the first. His blue-line floater caught Jarrett Rose's right shoulder, took a sharp turn straight down and trickled over the line.

Fellow defenceman Matt Bannan took the scoring reins from there, notching the game-winner in the second on a two-on-one break with French and firing a bullet from the point for the insurance marker early in the third.

Sandwiched in the middle of his two tallies was a feisty penalty-killing effort by Haydar, Ron Baker and Troy Walczak on McPhail's slashing major.

Jeff Hutchins, Jasen Hopeniavuori and Rich Williams were standouts Friday as

well with some thunderous checks that turned Rayside-Balfour's desperation into sheer exhaustion.

Walczak drew two assists on the night while Baker and Lee picked up the other helpers. Darren (Mini) Haydar, one of the more physical players throughout the series, was named the Most Sportsmanlike Player of the All-Ontario finals.

He finished the series with five goals and four assists. Rose took Most Valuable Player honours.

Merchant notes: Darren (Mini) Haydar is now up to 100 goals and 100 assists in 86 games this season ... Steve French celebrated his 21st birthday Friday ... Milton went 24-5 through the provincial playoffs.

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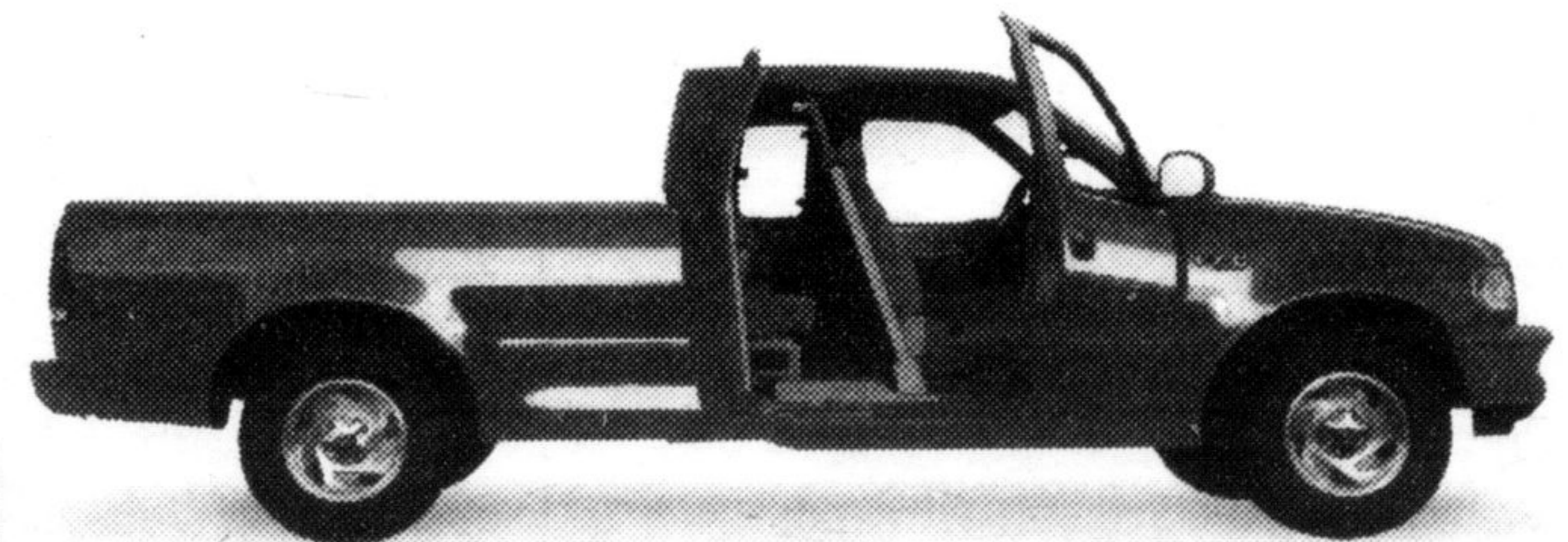
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