

# Mavs show grit in run-up to playoffs

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

*The Champion*

The Jr. B Mavericks were the comeback kids this past weekend, stealing victory out of the hands of defeat twice to solidify their tier 1 playoff spot.

Shutting down the opposition in the late stages of each contest, they rallied for wins number 14 and 15 and regained second place in the West Division.

Sunday afternoon Milton notched three unanswered goals down the stretch — including Russ Fleming's winner with 4:11 remaining — to trim Six Nations 10-8.

The victory gave them a 3-0 season sweep over the Red Rebels. The two teams are likely to meet in the first round of the playoffs and are still battling for home-floor advantage with just two

weeks left in the regular season.

Milton currently holds the upper hand with one more win.

Firing on all cylinders, the Mavericks enjoyed a potent powerplay as well as production from each of their top performers Sunday.

Craig Hedley unloaded with four goals and assisted on the insurance marker while Jimmy Leworthy Jr., Cory Leigh and captain Andrew Hartholt all had a handful of points.

Fleming drew two assists before sinking the go-ahead goal. Graham Darling finished the game with three helpers.

Recording his third win between the pipes was Andrew Dowdell, who was terrific in the first and final periods, holding Six Nations to just a pair of goals in each.

"We're picking it up and showing a lot more

intensity," said head coach Jim Leworthy, whose team now sits at 15-5. "The powerplay is starting to work for us and everyone seems to be doing their job."

Milton was even more effective with the man-advantage at home Friday. Scoring six times on eight powerplay stints kept them in the game while an 11th hour rally put them over the top in an 11-10 squeaker over Elora.

Leworthy Jr. provided the heroics inside the last three minutes, breaking to the middle and sliding one in low. It was his fourth of the game and first at even strength.

After having struggled offensively for a couple of weeks, Leigh tallied twice in the last eight minutes to even the count.

"It felt pretty good to start scoring again and get

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File photo

Jeff Daw

## Daw cuts a new deal

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logical of which was a career in finance.

"That's what I earned a degree in at U-Mass Lowell. I'll tell you though, the thought wasn't very comforting," recalled the former Milton Merchant star. "So many graduates have such a jump on me that it would have been tough to get any type of job, much less a good one."

Weighing his options was about all Daw could do during the 1996/97 season. He saw little ice time during his first few months with the Edmonton Oilers' farm team and at one point was even sent down to Wheeling, West Virginia of the East Coast Hockey League.

What's transpired since, however, is a complete turnaround that rivals that of even the most dramatic rags-to-riches stories.

And waiting at the end of a sensational sophomore year was a brand new two-way contract between Edmonton and Hamilton that was signed, sealed and delivered last week.

The deal presents Daw with his first real opportunity to crack the Oilers' lineup. Financial terms of the one-year contract are not being disclosed.

Said Daw, "It's a big relief. For the first time in my professional career I know where I'll be playing at the start of the summer rather than the end."

The Burlington native excelled at both ends of the ice this past season. He was the Bulldogs' best defensive forward and top scorer.

A plus-minus total of 28 — third best in the AHL — along with 28 goals and 35 assists in 79 games served as proof of his all-around ability.

Daw — who played four seasons with the Merchants — credits an extended playoff run in 1997 and more opportunity offered by Hamilton's coaching staff with his improved play.

No matter how well he performed, however, a one-way deal with Hamilton prevented him from being called up to the Oilers.

This restriction made for some pretty frustrating moments while Daw watched linemates Scott Fraser and Doug Friedman earn trips to the show.

Not only does his new two-way deal eliminate this obstacle but recent shuffling in the organization has opened things up even more.

"Edmonton just dealt away Tony Hrkac and Mike Watt and didn't replace them with other centre men so things just opened up," said Daw. "I'll be coming into camp with some real credentials now and with my strong defensive game I'd say my chances of making the Oilers are pretty good."

"I've just got to get myself into a couple of exhibition games and force them to like me."

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