

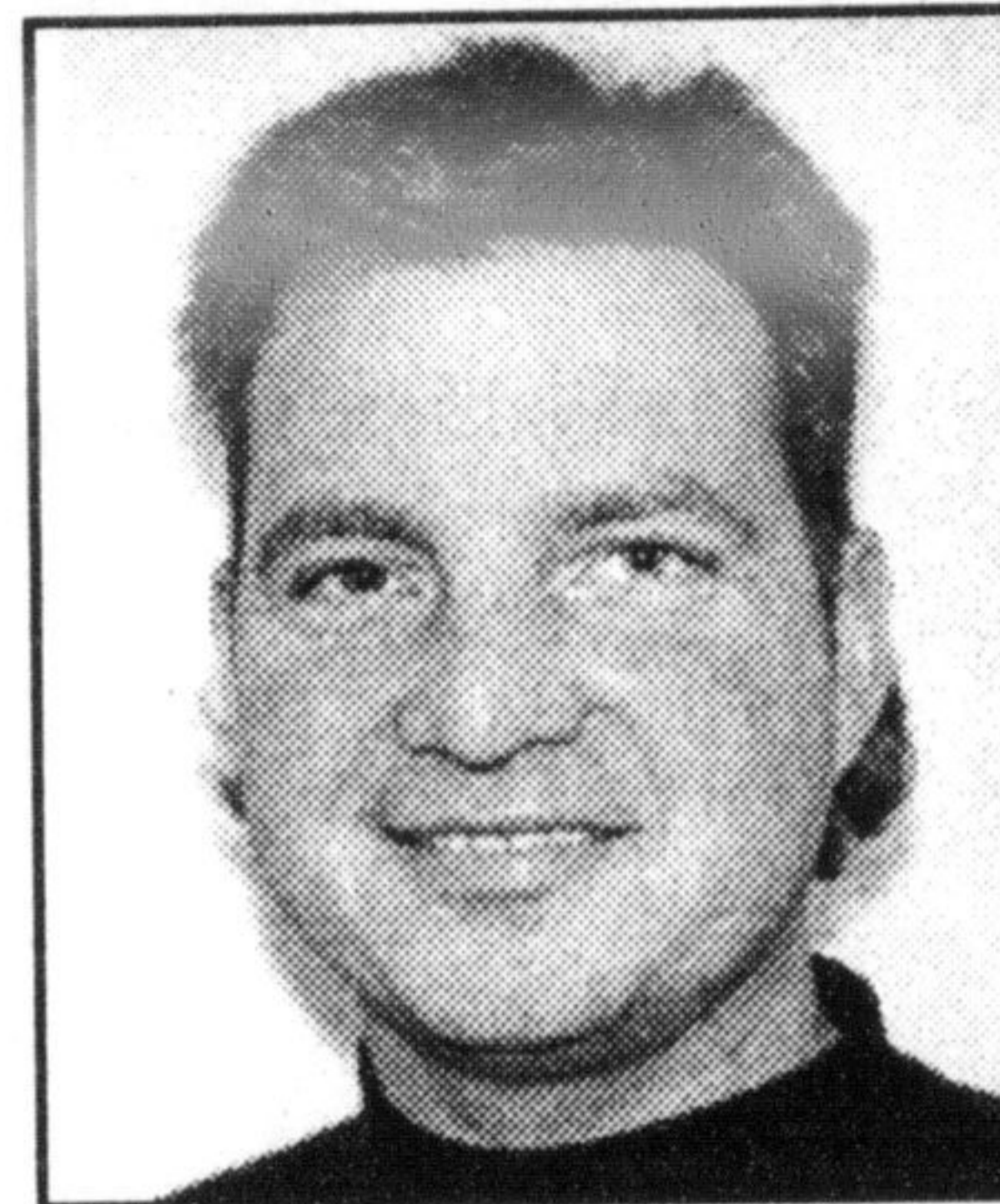
Milton explodes late in the game to bury G'town

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

When in doubt, always return to what's most familiar. The Jr. A Merchants did exactly that Friday at Memorial Arena — exploding with five unanswered goals in the third period to bury Georgetown 9-4. Late night scoring waves have been the defending league champs' strong suit over the past two-and-a-half seasons, although in recent weeks that aspect of their game had been shelved. Fortunately it hadn't collected much dust yet. "It was nice to see us put up big numbers again, that's the real Milton Merchants," said skipper Marty Williamson, whose team continues to sit atop the West Conference with a 25-2-3 record. While pleased with the outcome, the local bench boss was quick to acknowledge the possibility — however slim or bizarre it may have seemed — that the visitors could have actually stolen the win.

Georgetown erased no less than four one-goal deficits through the opening two frames before eventually short-circuiting. Added Williamson, "They (Georgetown) are a much improved team this year with one really good line. You've got to come into each game with a real purpose or this type of club can beat you. We saw that against Caledon." (Caledon, not among the league elite, upended Milton 6-4 a couple of months ago).

Ed McGrane and Mike Wheelihan each tallied twice in the last period to deep six the Raiders. Leading offensively over the course of the evening was Ryan Robichaud, who tagged a pair of goals and assisted on two more.



Marty Williamson

Captain Kevin O'Flaherty and Mark Beisel collected three helpers apiece while the hometown club's other marksmen were Chad Blundy, Nathan Gillies and Geoff Schomogyi.

Brydon Butterworth, Curtis Carr, Scott MacDonald and Stace Page replied for Georgetown with former Merchant Jeff Seeds setting up goals two and three.

Shots on net favoured the victors 37-33, with Jeremy Wenzel earning his 12th win between the pipes.

Friday's game quickly degenerated into a slugfest once the issue of a winner was resolved. A handful of fights broke out in the final eight minutes, most of that time with the locals short-handed.

Merchant notes: Prior to last night's visit to Mountain Arena, Milton rode a five-game winning streak ... The Merchants have yet to taste defeat on the road this season ... They begin a two-game home stand tonight against the basement dwelling Niagara Scenic. Friday the Oakville Blades visit Memorial Arena. Both games start at 8 p.m.

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Brush thriving on pro hockey in sunshine state

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Craig Brush is once again running the show. The Milton Merchants' most prolific scorer through the mid 1960s recently returned to the spotlight, only this time as the man in charge of team operations rather than just goals and assists. Now 50, he's founder, president and partial owner of the expansion Florida Everblades — the newest addition to the East Coast Hockey League (ECHL). They're an affiliate of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, whose proprietor Peter Karmanos is a longstanding friend of the former Miltonian. He lent his support to the establishment of the semi-pro franchise.

Although Florida was already home to four ECHL clubs, Brush knew from day one that the market wasn't quite full.

"I've had a vacation home down here for the last 10 years and there's so many Canadians wintering in Florida who're hungry for hockey," said the ex-insurance broker, who runs the Everblades in the southwest area of the state.

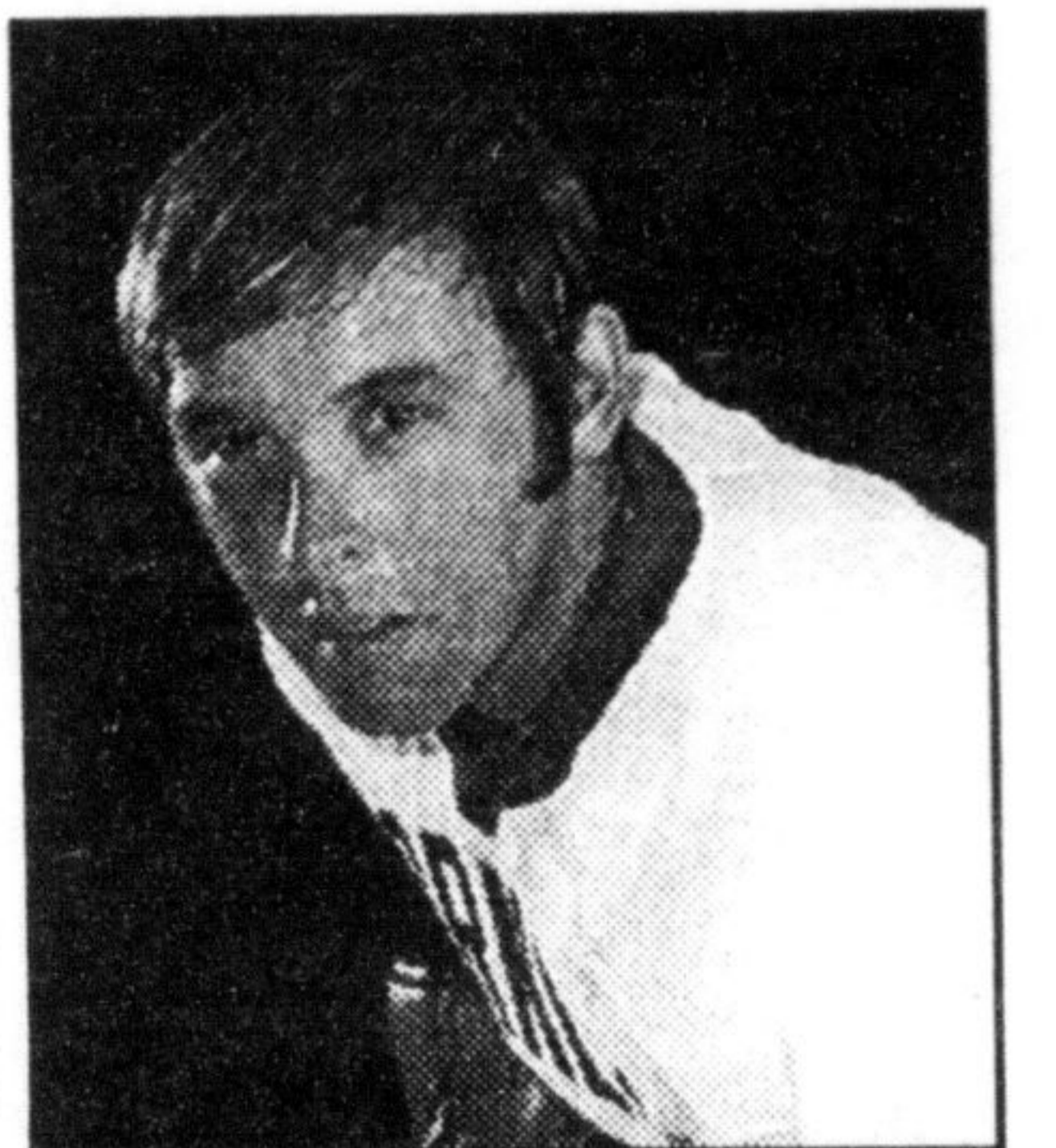
"Besides, we're five hours away from any other

team and there's no other major winter sports going on around here."

While the United States as a whole has now embraced the game, Brush recalls how the country was once very much divided in its knowledge and interest — or lack of same — about hockey.

"In the early 1980s I spent time in Virginia and the only ice they had there was in your drink," he remarked. "It was the complete opposite in Detroit, where we use to live. There's so much hockey there that it's almost unbelievable."

Brush's Everblades have been an overnight success story, in terms of drawing both fans and wins. Since moving into their new barn last month, the club has averaged 6,400 spectators a night, which puts them among the top five in the league for attendance.



Craig Brush in his Milton playing days.

Said the Milton native, "Those numbers have been a bit surprising, especially since we haven't had time to do much promotion. Building the arena has been our biggest project over the last year and it's certainly been our toughest.

"Watching Everblades hockey has literally become the thing to do in this area."

A 7-6 road trip to start their inaugural season — amazing by expansion team standards — is at least partially responsible for bringing in the fans.

Overall the club boasted a 13-6-1 record prior to the weekend and sat one point out of first-place in their Southern Conference.

This would be a major accomplishment for any expansion team, but it's all the more impressive since Florida has 11 players with no previous professional hockey experience.

Among them is Brush's eldest son Matt, who last year skated with the Princeton Tigers — alongside Milton's Scott Bertoli.

Their fathers played together as well with the Merchants.

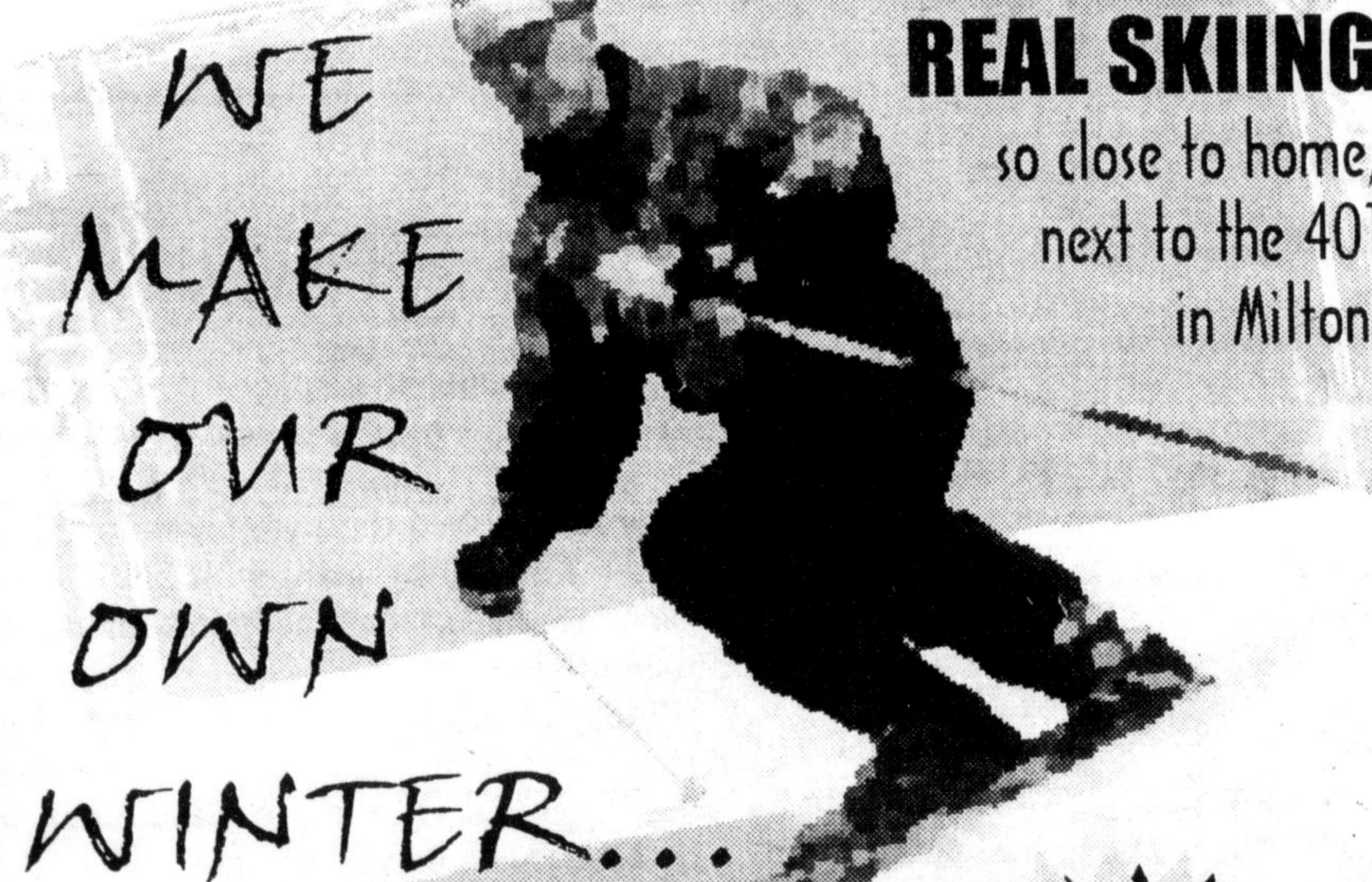
In addition to having a hand in the on-ice product, the Everblades' president is responsible for promoting the club, developing marketing strategies for team merchandise and overseeing phase two of arena construction.

"If putting in 12-hour days is a dream come true, then I'm living the dream," quipped Brush of his induction into professional hockey. "Seriously though, it's been great. I wake up every morning now all charged up about going to work."

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MILTON MINOR HOCKEY SCHEDULE

HOUSE LEAGUE DIVISION

Pre-Novice Dec. 19/98

7:00 am - 8:00 am	Red Timbit vs Green Timbit	Memorial Arena
8:00 am - 9:00 am	Red Lobster 1 vs Little Firemen	Memorial Arena
9:00 am - 10:00 am	Red Lobster 2 vs Bruce Hood	Memorial Arena
10:00 am - 11:00 am	White Timbit vs Black Timbit	Memorial Arena

Atom Dec. 19/98

3:00 pm - 4:30 pm	Clarke's Golf vs Ross Dixon Financial	Tonelli Arena
4:20 pm - 6:10 pm	Absolute Transp. Services vs. Rebekah Lodge	Tonelli Arena
6:20 pm - 7:50 pm	McCuaig Insurance vs Becton Dickinson	Tonelli Arena

Pee Wee Dec. 19/98

8:00 am - 9:00 am		Thompson Memorial
9:10 am - 10:10 am		Thompson Memorial
10:20 am - 11:20 am		Thompson Memorial

Minor-Novice Dec. 20/98

3:30 pm - 4:30 pm	Shoppers Drug Mart vs Remax	Tonelli Arena
4:30 pm - 5:30 pm	Hunt Plymouth vs Loblaws	Tonelli Arena

Major-Novice Dec. 20/98

5:30 pm - 6:30 pm	Canadian Tire vs Gorrud	Tonelli Arena
6:30 pm - 7:30 pm	Austin Noble vs Gold Connection	Tonelli Arena

Bantam Dec. 20/98

6:00 pm - 7:20 pm	Wimpy's Diner vs Milton Dodge Jeep	Thompson Memorial
7:20 pm - 8:40 pm	Marmac Trailer Services vs Knuckles	Thompson Memorial
8:40 pm - 10:00 pm	G.D. Controls vs Charlie Fitzwhiskies	Thompson Memorial

Senior Dec. 21/98

7:30 pm - 8:30 pm	Goodlife Fitness vs Culligan	Tonelli Arena
8:40 pm - 9:40 pm	Ross Dixon Financial vs Avanti Auto	Tonelli Arena
9:50 pm - 10:50 pm	Gus Mowbray Heating vs KFC	Tonelli Arena

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