



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION



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FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 1999

Like clockwork, Milton owns final frame

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

The Merchants' round two triumph had as much to do with a reliable routine as it did with good fortune.

Sure Milton caught some breaks throughout the conference semifinals. In Tuesday's 6-4 clincher opposing Georgetown had a goal called back, and referee Terry Hobor was mighty lenient on a first-period line brawl Milton initiated.

However, clockwork third-period dominance — afforded by depth and a fierce checking game — gave the provincial powerhouse three consecutive victories and the best-of-seven series in five games.

The Cinderella Raiders managed a great impersonation of a championship team, with an ample supply of character and determination, but in the end their desire to win clearly outweighed their ability to do so.

In each of the last three contests Milton outscored them at crunch time and trailed only once during the final frame.

"Winning consistently in the third period is a good sign, it shows we know how to battle," said Merchants coach Marty Williamson. "Once again they (Georgetown) pushed us hard and deserve a lot of credit, especially Jeff Seeds."

"He was too good to play third or fourth line here, which is why he was traded in the first place. He had my respect before the series and kept earning it as things progressed."

Respect is something Seeds became quite familiar with during the Milton-Georgetown clash, which re-ignited a competitive fire between the neighbouring communities.

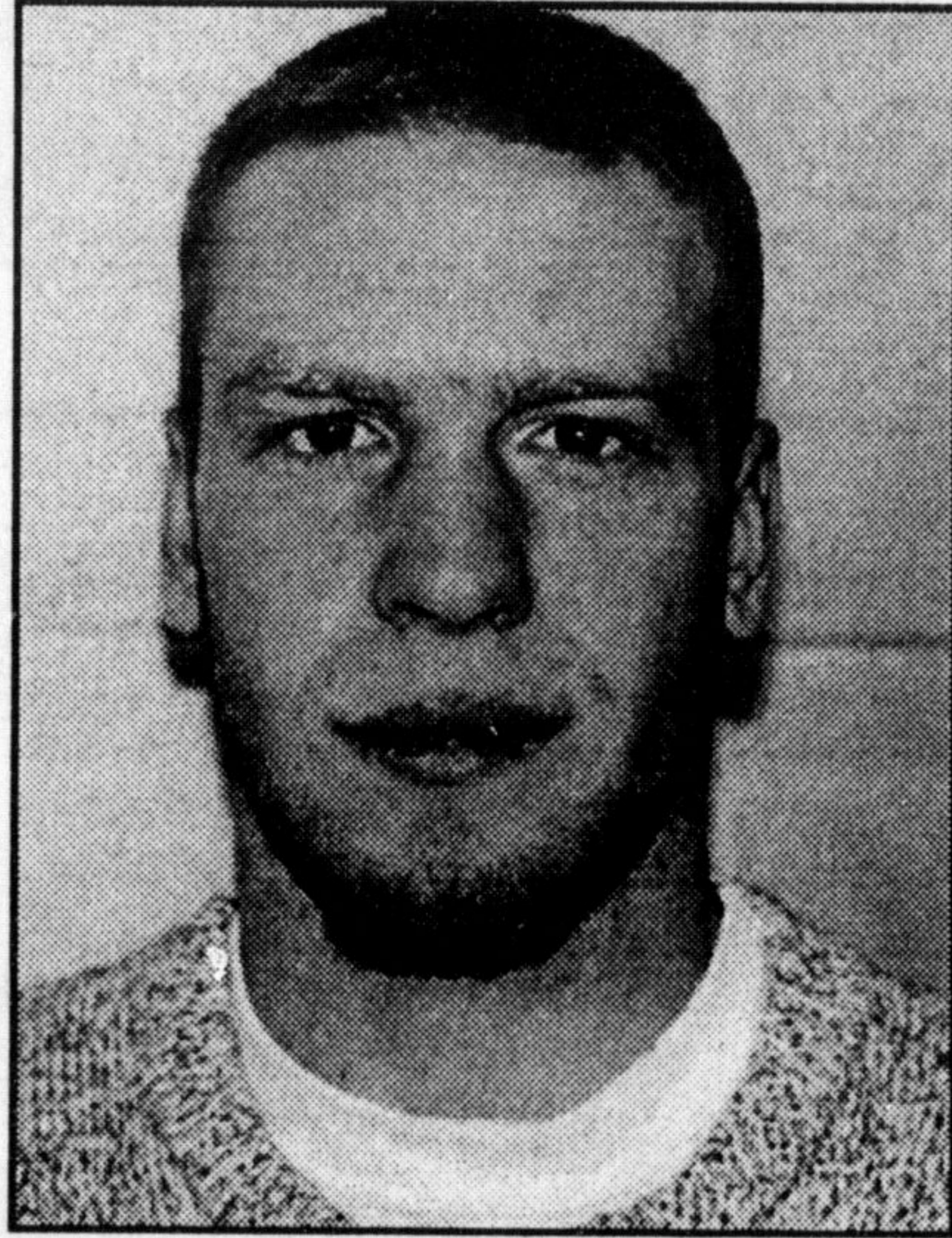
Realizing that their ex-teammate held the key to a possible — if not probable — upset, the Merchants attended to him with bruising hits and suffocating coverage throughout each tilt.

Seeds' still managed to be consistently impressive and occasionally explosive. His seemingly tireless efforts were the main reason why Georgetown prevented a sweep and made the north Halton clash one to remember.

"I hope I did (gain respect from Milton)," he said, following Tuesday's battle. "We put up a good effort. Games three through five could have easily gone either way."

The Merchants polished off their feisty rivals with three goals in the last 10 minutes Tuesday at Memorial Arena, which housed a near capacity crowd the likes of which aren't usually seen until much later in the playoffs.

Spearheading the victors' final drive were Geoff Schomogyi and Ryan



Ryan Robichaud

Robichaud, who tagged the equalizer and go-ahead goals respectively just 3:11 apart.

Linemate Ed McGrane — who'd been held scoreless in the series — sank a long distance empty netter with 38 seconds remaining to seal the deal.

Robichaud delivered in the opening frame as well, scoring at 17:15 on a huge break to the inside that was arguably the best looking goal of the series.

Also burying the biscuit were Mark Beisel and Jamie Dubrick, who escaped ejection despite viciously laying out Raider Billy Fetherston late in the first.

Seeds, Stace Page, Andrew Sandziuk and Stanislav Tchistov replied with goals for Georgetown.

Backstopping Milton was Jeremy Wenzel, who made 30 saves for his fifth playoff win.

Merchant notes: Milton has a 49-20 playoff record since Marty Williamson took over as head coach in 1996/97 ... The Merchants need 16 more wins for a return trip to the Royal Bank Cup.

10k clinic

Oakville's Running Company begins its nine-week 'Faster 10km' clinic this Saturday, March 13.

The program is designed for serious runners who want to improve their times. Included are lectures by experienced runners who'll address areas such as motivation, training techniques and nutrition.

Each weekly clinic is followed by a group run during which elements of form and speed will be demonstrated and practiced.

To register, or for more information, call The Running Company's Steve McKinnon at 815-1952.

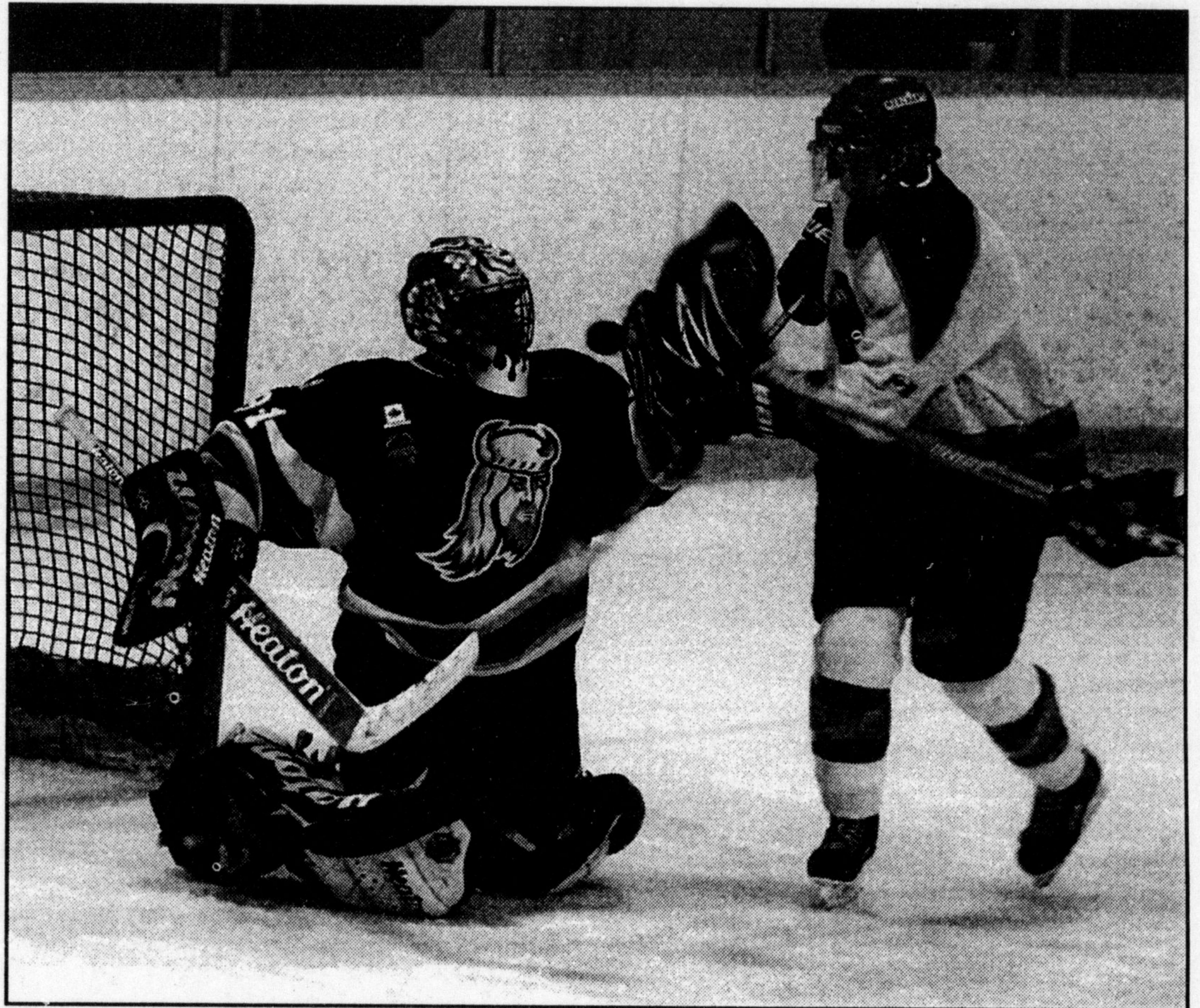


Photo by HERB GARBUTT

Merchant Geoff Schomogyi gets stopped by Georgetown goalie Jeff Hladys Tuesday at Memorial Arena. Milton won 6-4 to clinch the conference semifinals in five games.

Bramalea will likely be blue

The Merchants' last two conference triumphs were both fashioned under extreme circumstances.

In 1997 they took fans on an electrifying seven-game roller coaster ride before finally disposing of Bramalea.

In 1998 they enjoyed an easy sweep over Hamilton, who after playing giant killer through rounds one and two were exhausted and offered nothing more than token resistance.

This year's title run should fall somewhere in the middle as the defending champs get set to face the always impressive but currently injury-plagued Bramalea Blues.

Bramalea has yet to lose in the playoffs, sweeping Oakville and Streetsville, but with top gunner Mike Cammalleri still on the disabled list they don't seem capable of dethroning the Merchants.

The Blues' star figured in exactly 40 per cent of his team's scoring — with 31 goals and 103 points — before sustaining a season-ending leg injury in late January.

Also missing is spark plug forward John Dibatista, out with a torn knee.

Of course they still have MVP Kyle Amyotte,

who's always productive and frequently outstanding, but now he'll be the chief focus of the three-peaked Merchants and will no doubt be suffocated by defensive coverage throughout the series.

Lacking in size and toughness as well, Bramalea will have to play a wide-open style and hope to take an early lead. The longer the series progresses, the slimmer their chances of victory become.

"They (Blues) haven't lost yet and are a very smart hockey club. Still, I don't think they can take real physical pressure from a team like us for very long," said Milton head coach Marty Williamson.

Milton Merchants vs. Bramalea Blues

- Game 1: Friday, Mar. 12 at Milton 8 p.m.
 - Game 2: Sunday, Mar. 14 at Bram. 8 p.m.
 - Game 3: Tuesday, Mar. 16 at Milton 8 p.m.
 - Game 4: Friday, Mar. 19 at Bram. 7:45 p.m.
 - If necessary:
 - Game 5: Sunday, Mar. 21 at Milton 7:30 p.m.
 - Game 6: Monday, Mar. 22 at Bram. 7:45 p.m.
 - Game 7: Tuesday, Mar. 23 at Milton 8 p.m.
- (Season Series: Milton 2-1-1)



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