



# SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION



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## Nice, late gift for Bramalea's Blues

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

If the Merchants wish to hold on to their remaining titles, they can ill afford another giveaway like the one Tuesday night at Memorial Arena.

The defending provincial Jr. A. champions — who have already relinquished their conference crown and are now playing the role of underdog — coughed up a 3-1 lead on Bramalea in the last few minutes of regulation time.

Milton then surrendered a third straight goal 5:09 into sudden death for their most heartbreaking loss of the playoffs.

This knotted the league finals at one win apiece and allowed the Blues, who are intent on emptying their rivals' trophy case this spring, to regain both momentum and home ice advantage in the best-of-seven rematch, which continues tonight at Victoria Park Arena.

Milton's late collapse spoiled what was otherwise an inspiring performance, arguably their best within the past couple of weeks.

Through much of the evening the Merchants were in clear control, with sharp goaltending by Jeremy Wenzel, a fierce checking game and the resurgence of their powerplay, which accounted for all three goals.

The Merchants also managed to neutralize their opponents' speed while players like Mark Beisel, Ed McGrane and Ryan Robichaud sacrificed their bodies in order to win corner battles and sustain pressure in the offensive zone.

A few too many rash penalties down the stretch, however, would open the door for Bramalea's uprising.

Captain Kyle Amyotte drew his visitors within one on the man advantage, burying a blueline shot through traffic at 14:25.

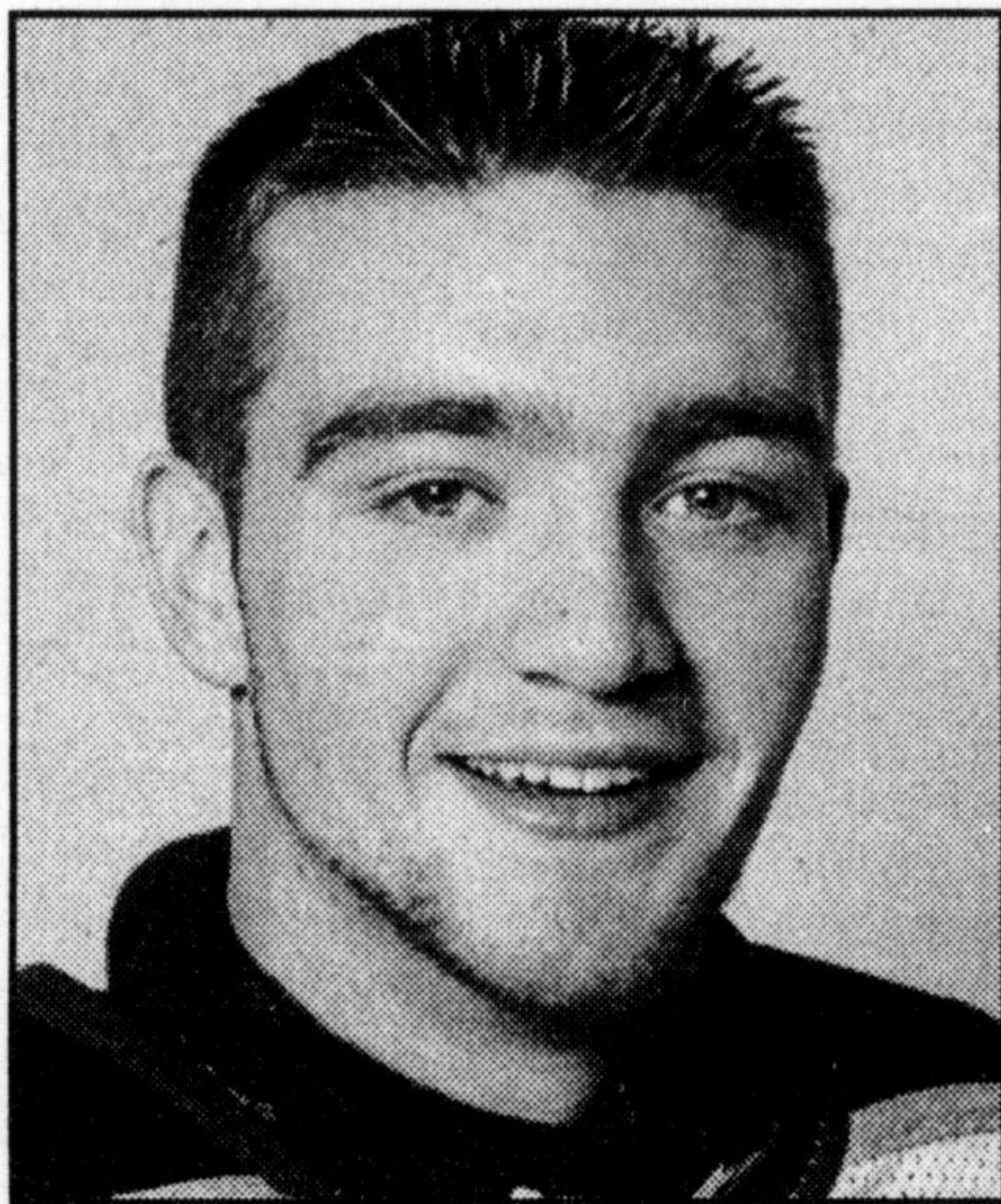
Moments later returning spark plug John DiBatista drilled a spinning blast in the bottom shelf for the equalizer.

The stage was then set for defenceman Darryl Baker, who capped the Blues' comeback win by beating Wenzel with an upstairs wrist shot midway through the first overtime session.

Also scoring for the winners was Roberto Orofiamma, with David Peca picking up a pair of assists. Rookie T.J. Aceti backstopped the club to victory, making 26 saves along the way.

Milton used the point to tally twice in the second and looked to be headed towards their first decisive playoff win against Bramalea.

Registering goals 18 minutes apart in the middle frame were captain Kevin O'Flaherty and Ryan Carrigan, who also



**Jeremy Wenzel**

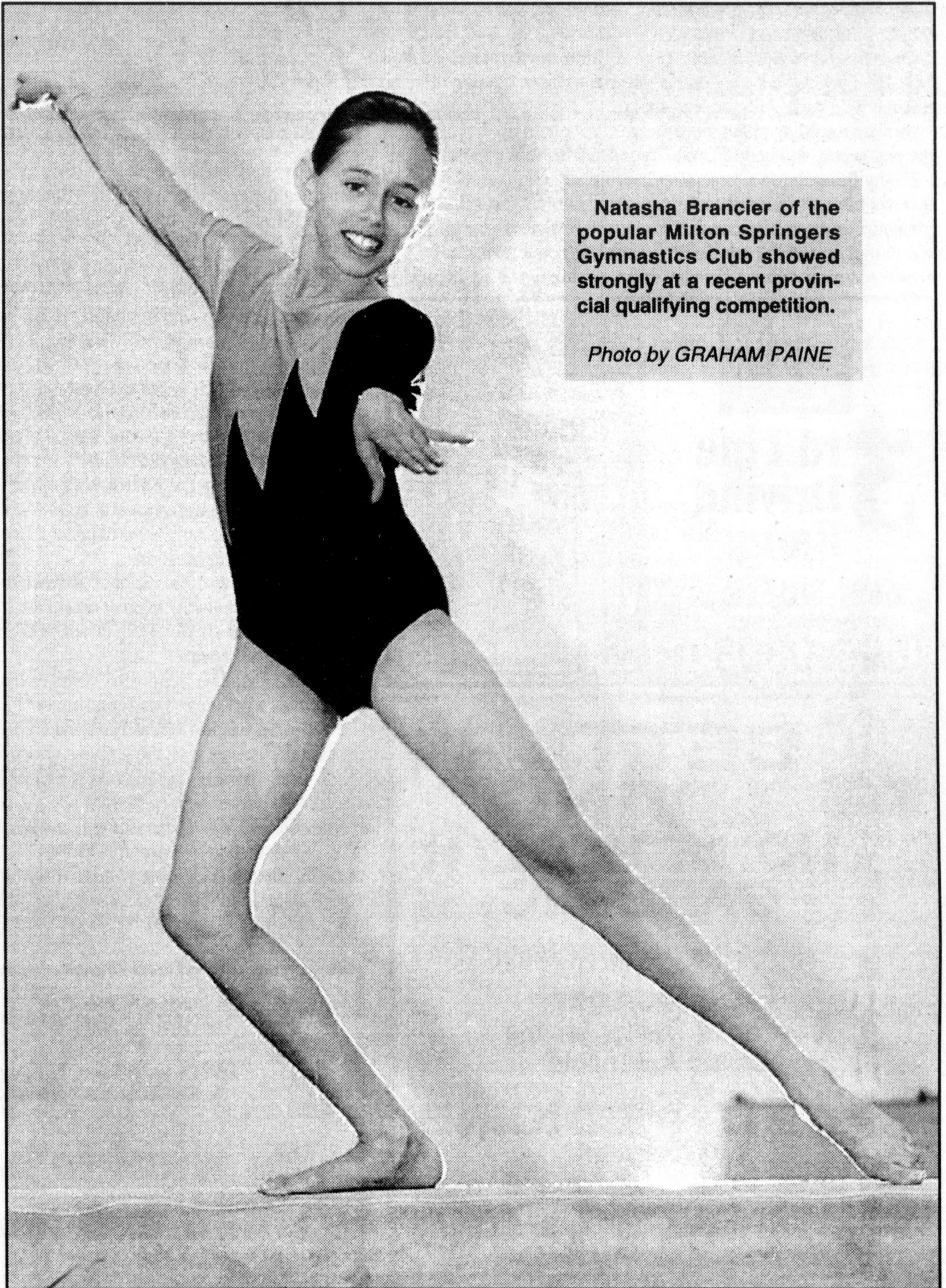
drew two helpers for his second three-point effort in post season play.

McGrane delivered the opening tally late in the first. He sank a huge rebound left by Chris Rowan.

Other assists went to David Csumrik, Nathan Gillies and Geoff Schomogyi — who was the team's most reliable sniper through the regular season but has dented the twine just once in his last dozen outings.

Even more surprising is Ryan Eby still being without a goal this late in the playoffs.

**Merchant notes:** Milton's usual third-period dominance is on temporary hiatus. They've been held scoreless through the final stanza in their last two games ... Milton has played 22 post season games so far. Last year they competed in 29 before reaching the Royal Bank Cup, which this season will be held in Yorkton, Saskatchewan ... Milton's Matt Bannan and Bramalea's Mike Cammalleri could be back for tonight's contest, which starts at 7:45 p.m. Game four of the league finals is set for Sunday at Memorial at 8 p.m. with game five going the following evening in Bramalea at 7:45 p.m.



Natasha Brancier of the popular Milton Springers Gymnastics Club showed strongly at a recent provincial qualifying competition.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

## Risk pays off for Brancier

Repeat old conquests or explore new worlds. That was the scenario facing Milton Springers' Natasha Brancier at the start of gymnastics season. On the one hand, she could have returned to the inter-club scene where she had shone brightly over the previous two years.

Her alternative? Throw caution to the wind and leap head first into the challenging and prestigious arena of provincial competition.

The more venturesome path was eventually chosen, and paid huge dividends at the third and final Central Region Qualifying Meet, held recently in Owen

Sound. The 11-year-old gymnast started out with a bang, claiming gold in the Pre-Junior 1 vault for her impressive half-on, half-off handspring routine.

From there, Brancier took fourth on bars and fifth on floor to capture bronze in the overall standings and earn a berth to next month's Ontario Championships in Oakville.

"We are all very proud of Natasha's accomplishments this year," said Springers' head coach Janet Campbell. "Natasha worked extremely hard to get her

• see **ALTERNATES** on page 23



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