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Sharpening his skills after three-year layoff

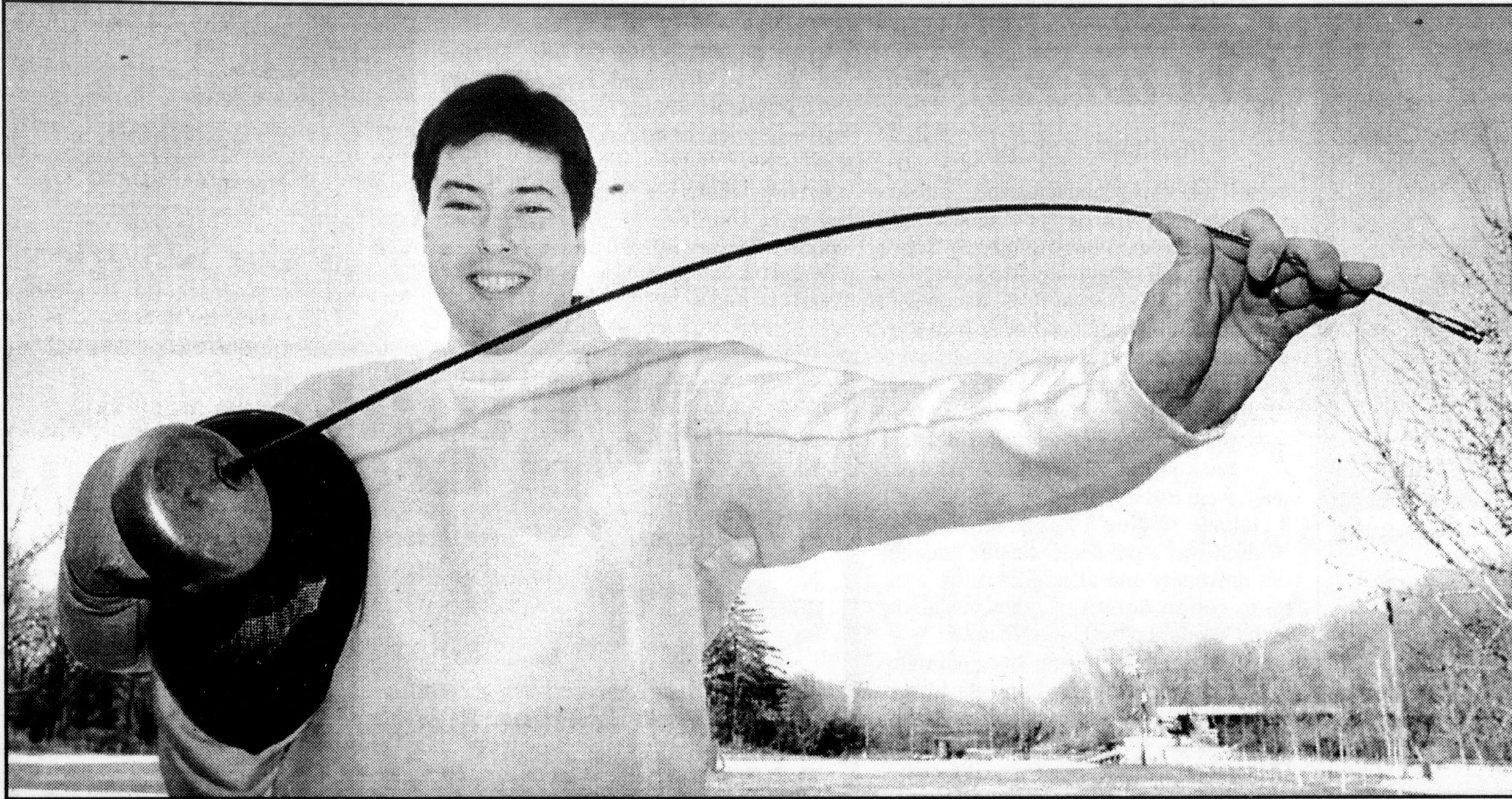


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Stephen Willson recently made a return to the sport of fencing and showed strongly at Le Grand Duel (World Cup) in Montreal.

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Stephen Willson likes to get a little medieval when it comes to beating his opponents.

Not in an overly aggressive or punishing manner mind you, but with flair and finesse through the age-old art of fencing.

Last summer the 29-year-old Miltonian returned to the sport — which dates back to 1200 BC but was refined and popularized in the Middle Ages — and has already regained a lot of the ground he lost from a three-year hiatus. During that time he lived in Nova Scotia and didn't have access to training facilities.

"Many of the guys I used to compete against were at the top of the provincial and national rankings so when I came back to Ontario I wanted to prove to myself that I could compete with the best of them," said Willson, who practices his craft in Mississauga under the tutelage of former Polish National Team member J.M. Zakrzewski.

And what better way to sharpen those skills than at Le Grand Duel, one of the World Cup Series events held every spring in Montreal.

Milton's swordsman recently took part in the international showcase and despite not winning any of his six matches, came away with a feeling of victory.

He explained, "I really pushed all of my opponents. They had to work hard for the wins. My coach was extremely pleased with my results, especially since I've only been back about a year.

"Next year the goal is to place top 64 and advance to direct eliminations."

Among opponents he took to the limit were a couple of towering competitors from Germany — who seem to breed some of the tallest and most talented fencers in the world.

"I guess over there, instead of playing basketball these guys go into fencing. But then the sport is so much bigger over in Europe than it is here," said the local fencer, who's hoping to organize a summer competition at the Farm Museum, where he works.

Willson competes in the Men's Epee class, which uses the longest weapons and where — unlike in other divisions — each and every body part is a target.

He said his helmet can get quite dented and though participants wear protective gear and have safety tips on their weapons, bruises from hits are commonplace.

Willson's induction into fencing came 10 years ago at Brock University, where

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Walking on water with a little bit of style

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

Paul Macdonald doesn't just walk on water — he adds style, speed and showmanship to the challenge.

Sounds like a pretty tall order, right? Well welcome to the world of barefoot waterskiing, a prominent player in the 'extreme sports' fraternity and number one fixation of the 23-year-old Miltonian.

Currently training in Florida, Macdonald cleared another rung on the ladder of success last weekend with a golden performance at the U.S. Southern Series Opener.

Four dozen elite competitors in the 18 to 24 age class descended on Tampa for the first major event of the season — but none could outshine the lone Canadian entry.

His overall top finish featured convincing wins in all three disciplines including slalom, trick and jump.

"I was very happy with my results. I was nervous going in, but it turns out all the preparation I've done here since the fall has been a big benefit," said the longtime Miltonian, from his temporary residence in Lakeland, Florida.

Macdonald set new individual standards in every category, with his best efforts

reserved for the trick event.

A near flawless acrobatics display — highlighted by a stellar toe turn during which he grips the handle with one foot and rides on the other before spinning backwards, again without the use of his hands — placed him 400 points ahead of the runner-up.

Explained Macdonald, "The toe turn is something that just a few of us attempt. I incorporate roughly eight to 10 tricks in my routine. You only have a 15-second pass in which to do it, so it's pretty tough.

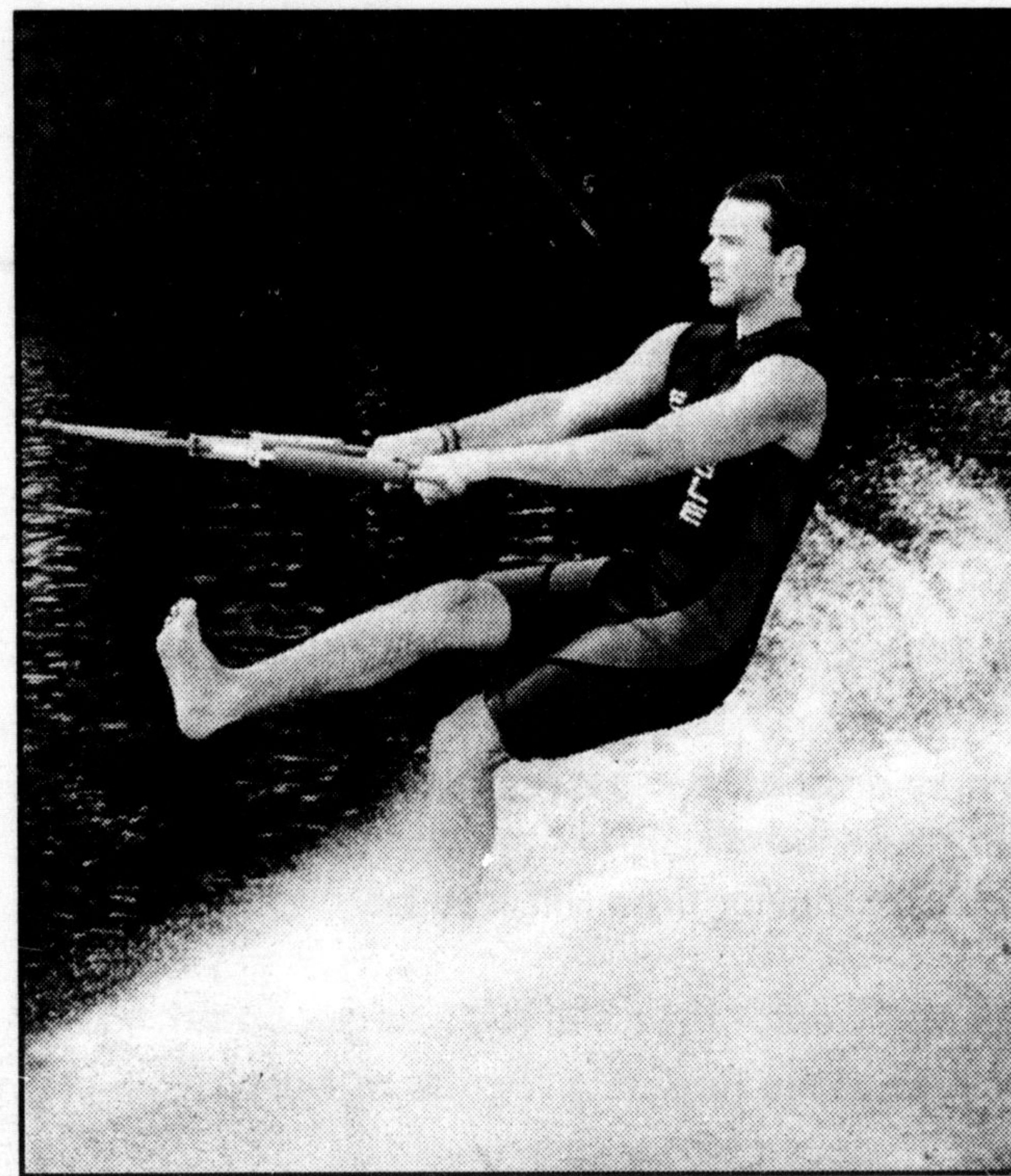
"The harder the trick, the more points you get. But you've got to include a certain amount as well, so the idea is to mix quality and quantity."

In the slalom event, where points are awarded for complete crossings of a designated area while bonuses are given for one forward and one backward pass, he outdistanced his closest challenger by two full crossings.

Meanwhile in the jump-off, Macdonald cleared 42 feet — seven more than the second-place finisher.

"The jump is made out of fiberglass and gets even more slippery than the water.

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Milton's Paul Macdonald is a top contender on the North American barefoot water-skiing circuit. He won a major event last weekend in Florida.



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