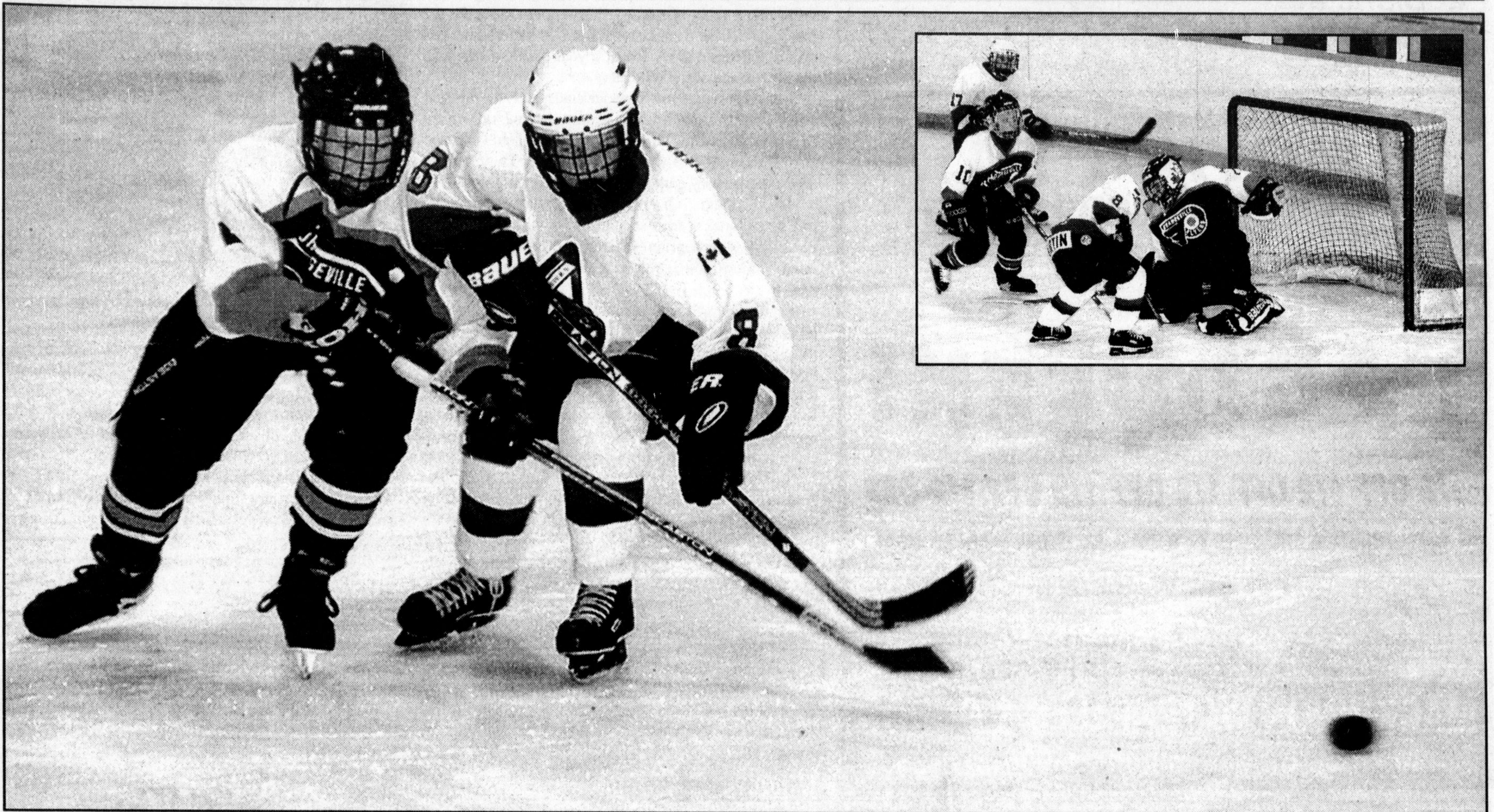


SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2000



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

✓ Milton's Jeremy Martin (above and inset) battles for the puck through open ice and around the opposing net in major atom play against the Orangeville Flyers Saturday. The Winterhawks lost the provincial playoff game 8-3 and now trail the first round series two games to none.

Merchants to open against Cougars

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

A winless weekend might just be a blessing in disguise for the Merchants.

While Milton's failure to steal second place from Brampton leaves them without home-ice advantage for round two, it does allow them to open the playoffs with arguably the most favourable of scenarios.

Marty Williamson's troops finishing third puts them up against the Cougars. With a somewhat shaky end to the regular season and a couple of key players on the shelf including big stud defenceman Jeff State, Burlington is probably the most vulnerable of the lower echelon teams right now.

The Merchants' skipper isn't taking anything for granted, however — especially considering how erratic his own club has been lately.

"It'd be nice to have a full lineup ourselves," he said, following another weekend without all

his big guns available. "This could be the most interesting playoffs in years. I don't think you're going to see any sweeps in the first round."

Certainly not by his own squad, if recent results are any indication. Heading into tonight's regular season finale in Bramalea, Milton (29-13-3-3) rides a nine-game winless streak on the road that continued in Oakville Sunday.

The Blades had seven call-ups playing but still managed to tie the Merchants 3-3. Milton was missing Ian Malcolm and Ryan Eby — who were visiting Alabama—Huntsville and nursing the flu respectively.

But Phil Barski's long-awaited return from a concussion helped make up some of the difference. He set up two goals including the tying tally by rearguard Chris Kerr.

The Merchants delivered one of the best defensive efforts through the opening frame, but eased up in the middle stanza — something they're doing on a regular basis these days — and surrendered back-to-back goals.

"This could be the most interesting playoffs in years. I don't think you're going to see any sweeps in the first round."

MARTY WILLIAMSON

Also scoring were Elliot Altberg and captain Chad Blundy.

Derek Klowak, Eugene Repa and Jason Sajko replied for the Blades.

At home Friday, Milton was severely thin up front with Barski, Eby and Malcolm all out of the lineup.

This plus some unfavourable officiating cost

them a 6-3 loss to the Streetsville Derbys — who're now on a five-game unbeaten streak against the Merchants.

Larry Moniz tallied twice for the winners while conference scoring leader Andy Rozak had a goal and two assists. Goalie Terry Lenyk recorded his fourth win of the year over Milton.

Altberg, Dan DeLong and Mike Wheelihan did the scoring for the hosts. Picking up a couple of assists was Kerr.

Milton will host game one of the best-of-seven series against Burlington Friday.

Merchant notes: Milton isn't expected to pick up any individual honours when the league awards are announced this week ... The Merchants finished with just three losses at home this season, two in regulation and the other in overtime ... Milton had the best goals-against average in the West Conference this season but didn't have a single player finishing in the top 10 scoring race ... Malcolm and Eby should be back to start the first round Friday.

**'99 TERCELS
PRICED TO GO!**

- 4 DOOR •AUTOMATIC
- 60/40 Fold Down Rear Seat
- Intermittent Wipers
- AM/FM Cassette Stereo
- Body Side Moulding



\$14,995

M.S.R.P. + Tax



ONLY
9
AVAILABLE

Not exactly as shown

GEORGETOWN TOYOTA SALES
15 MOUNTAINVIEW RD. N., 877-2296 Tor. 874-4276
WEBSITE at www.haltonhills.com/toyota or E-MAIL at toyota@aztec-net.com