

SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2000

Merchants-Cougars series tied 1-1

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Nobody said it was going to be easy.

The Merchants were the better hockey club for most of the weekend, but that wasn't quite reflected on the scoreboard in the opening stages of their first round match with Burlington.

Milton, while enjoying the edge in shots on net as well as overall special-teams play, came away with only a split from games one and two with the Cougars.

Each team triumphed on home ice — the Merchants 6-3 Friday and the Cougars 4-2 Sunday.

Unlike the previous two times they were vanquished at Central Arena, Milton's effort wasn't to blame for the loss Sunday. A couple of mental miscues by the defense put them behind before the game was nine minutes old and over the balance of the evening they were repeatedly turned aside by crafty cager Matt Cifelli.

"I thought we outplayed them in most areas tonight, we just didn't get rewarded for it," said coach Marty Williamson.

The Merchants' skipper was encouraged by a lot of different aspects of his club's performance over the weekend, including a revitalized powerplay that accounted for three quarters of their scoring.

But at the same time, he was noticeably frustrated with his opponents' obstructive style that went unpunished for most of Sunday.

"They (Cougars) were clutching and grabbing all night," remarked Williamson. "Other than the referee calling it, there's not much that can be done. We've just got to keep our feet moving and try to avoid it."

Burlington's Ryan Wilson delivered a couple of goals in game two, including the eventual winner that came on a two-man advantage late in the second.

Instigator Kevin Bieksa sealed the deal with a last-minute empty netter while also scoring was Matt Howard.

Ian Malcolm and Richard Peverley replied for Milton. Both scored on the powerplay with help from defenceman Ryan Carrigan.

At Memorial Arena Friday, Milton answered the opening bell of the series in superb fashion. In addition to a potent powerplay, their corner work at both ends of the ice was exceptional while penalty killing efforts were well above par as well.

Merchant blueliners limited their guests to just 21 shots and were rock solid with the game still up for grabs in the third.

Rearguards Chris Kerr and Adam



Photo by PETER McCUSKER

Merchants goalie Andrew Gibson gets up-ended by Burlington's Ryan Wilson during game two Sunday. Milton lost 4-2 and are now tied at one game a piece with the Cougars.

Sturgeon finally put the visitors on ice with long range empty net markers inside the last minute of play.

Elliot Altberg led with a goal and two assists while linemate Phil Barski — now back in tiptop form since his lengthy respite for a concussion — amassed three helpers.

Also lighting the lamp were Carrigan, Peverley and Rob Martin.

Burlington's first two goals came from Matt McLellan. Derek Myronuk had the other.

Netminder Andrew Gibson worked both games for Milton. Overall he stopped 38 of 44 shots. The series continues tonight at Memorial Arena. Game time is 8 p.m.

Seeds' Raiders slow out of gate

Milton's Jeff Seeds has been here before.

Two years ago he was part of the Jr. A Merchants squad that trailed Oakville 2-0 in round two of the playoffs.

He now finds himself in an identical dilemma with Georgetown — who finished first in the regular season but are behind the proverbial eight ball in their opening round series with Jay Anderson's Blades.

Having faced this hardship before — and knowing it can be overcome — Seeds took it upon himself to address his Raider peers following Sunday's 5-3 defeat at Oakville's IceSports Arena.



Jeff Seeds

"There's a lot of similarities between the two situations. I stepped up and told these guys that we can turn this thing around," said the outspoken winger. "Anything's possible. We just need one big game to regain the momentum."

Seeds, the most seasoned Raider with two playoff runs under his belt, finished fourth in the West Conference scoring race with 26 goals and 83 total points.

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