



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Peewees end lengthy title drought



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Single A major peewees (from left) Cory Whyte, Sam Tomlinson, Greg Pepper and Steve Ellison display their OMHA hardware after disposing of Essex in a championship finals sweep.

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

The drought is over.

OMHA gold had eluded local peewee teams for two decades — until the Milton Winterhawks' A majors put the brakes on the championship-less stretch last Friday.

In Essex, Eric Ellison's squad clinched the title with an authoritative 5-1 decision to cap a three-game sweep of the Ravens.

The victory was the team's seventh straight — dating back to the fifth and deciding game of the quarterfinals against Orangeville.

Total team effort

"It was an all-around big performance and a great win of us," said the jubilant head coach. "Defensively, we were very solid and Mike (Sanders) played really good in net."

The Action Utility Trailer sponsored club had a stranglehold on the best-of-five set heading into action last Friday. However, they didn't have the luxury of returning home in the event of a loss.

Looking ahead at a potentially lengthy and exhausting road trip, with a possible three games in as many days, they realized the momentum could shift significantly if Essex were allowed to prolong the series.

But that point was made moot by the end of the night — after they delivered an exceptional effort and buried the Ravens.

Leading the victory march was captain Steve Ellison.

Coming through with a season-ending gem of a performance, he amassed four points including a natural hat-trick in the opening half that put the hosts' championship bid on ice.

His winning goal was notched in particularly memorable fashion. With Milton at a two-man disadvantage late in the opening frame — after they were penalized for their first of three 'illegal sticks' — the diminutive captain capitalized on a broken play and scored just a few moments into the shorthanded stint.

"I think that really deflated them," he said.

From there, the reliable sniper lit the lamp once more in the second period and then joined forces with his teammates to put a stronghold defense on their hosts.

Said Ellison, "It was a whole-out effort from everyone. It was just awesome."

Added his father, "The guys were really ready for this one. They (Essex) kept calling us for illegal equipment, but it just didn't faze us."

Cushioning Milton's lead down the stretch with goals four and five was Kyle Thomas while fellow spark plug Greg Pepper assisted on his first marker — plus the initial tally by Ellison.

Drawing single helpers were Ellison and Sam Tomlinson.

Sanders was rock solid throughout the night, turning back 31 shots to record the win and erase the bad taste still lingering from a substandard showing in the series opener.

Making up the rest of this season's championship squad were Jason Bouwman, Dan Christo, Phil Foley, Chris Hill, Jake Madansky, Robert Morrow, Johnny Murphy, Jay Price, Mark Strazdins, Craig Stover, Chris Whiting and Cory Whyte plus coaching staff members Dennis Christo, Tom Pepper and Steve Sanders.

Merchants skipper heading to Newmarket

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

Merchant fans hit the target — but it was far from a bullseye.

Many Milton Jr. A hockey followers had been speculating for weeks that head coach Marty Williamson wouldn't be back next season. And while that's now true, his departure doesn't relate to the team's lack of success this past year — or for that matter, with hockey at all.

In what he described as a 'family-oriented move', the seasoned skipper — who faced plenty of criticism during the local club's less than impressive season — has abdicated his dual role as the Merchants' bench boss and general manager to sign on as an assistant coach with the Newmarket Hurricanes.

The move will keep him closer to home, especially now that he's in the process of moving to Keswick, and give him much more time to spend with his young daughter.

The decision was announced Tuesday.

"I want everyone to know that this had absolutely nothing to do with hockey or the organization," said Williamson, Milton's second longest serving coach in recent memory — next to Rick Bince. "This was a very difficult decision, one of the hardest I've ever had to make."

Merchants' owner Brad Grant confirmed that this was an amicable move, stating "From a personal standpoint, it's a good move for Marty. He asked me if he could interview for the position and I gave him my blessing. Newmarket will benefit from having him aboard, and now we've got to find another strong coach -- somebody highly motivated, who's a good recruiter and strong disciplinarian."

Grant wouldn't throw out any names of candidates, but did say



Marty Williamson

he has a few proven coaches in mind, and hopes to have someone in place for next month's spring training camp.

He wouldn't say if the new person would also assume the general manager duties.

Nick Slawson, Milton's director of hockey operations, said he understands Williamson's decision, but is no less disappointed to see him leave.

"I really enjoyed working with Marty. We'll miss him," he remarked.

"However, I'm confident we'll find a strong coach. There won't be any interruptions in Milton."

Williamson — the Merchants' most successful skipper, who took the team to the nationals in 1998 and brought a total of a dozen team titles to Milton during his four-year tenure — now joins highly accomplished coach Brad Sellwood in Newmarket.

Sellwood replaces Wes Jarvis, another proven bench boss who parted ways with the Hurricanes earlier this month after almost a decade at the helm.

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