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TUESDAY APRIL 11, 2000

Rebuilding begins for Jr. B Mavericks

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Mavericks GM Dave Decaire won't deny that his junior lacrosse team is in for a major rebuilding period this season.

But he's also not buying into pre-season scuttlebutt that his club — silver medalists at last summer's national championships — is set to crumble.

"The OLA's unofficial website has us ranked seventh in the West Division. I'd be disappointed with that kind of finish," he stressed, during the opening of training camp at the John Tonelli Sports Centre Saturday.

With long-time stars Andrew Hartholt, Jimmy Leworthy Jr. and Graham Darling all going over plus fellow standouts Cory Leigh and Chris Powless most likely graduating to the Jr. A ranks this year, Milton is now in the midst of its biggest exodus of talent in franchise history.

However, Decaire seems fairly confident that newly hired skipper John Chandler — successor to recently retired Jim Leworthy — and a rash of up-and-coming prospects will help the team sustain its competitiveness.

Fast game expected

"John will use the entire bench more and have these guys in shape," suggested Decaire. "He goes with a fast-paced, quick transition game that with a much younger team will work to our advantage."

And while somewhat disappointed with the initial turnout at camp, the general manager said the club should boast a strong local flavour this year.

Noted Decaire, "Guys like Derek Mewhinney, Bobby MacDonald and Blair Beaulieu all have a good chance of making it. Matt O'Meara's another one. He's big and could fit in nicely."

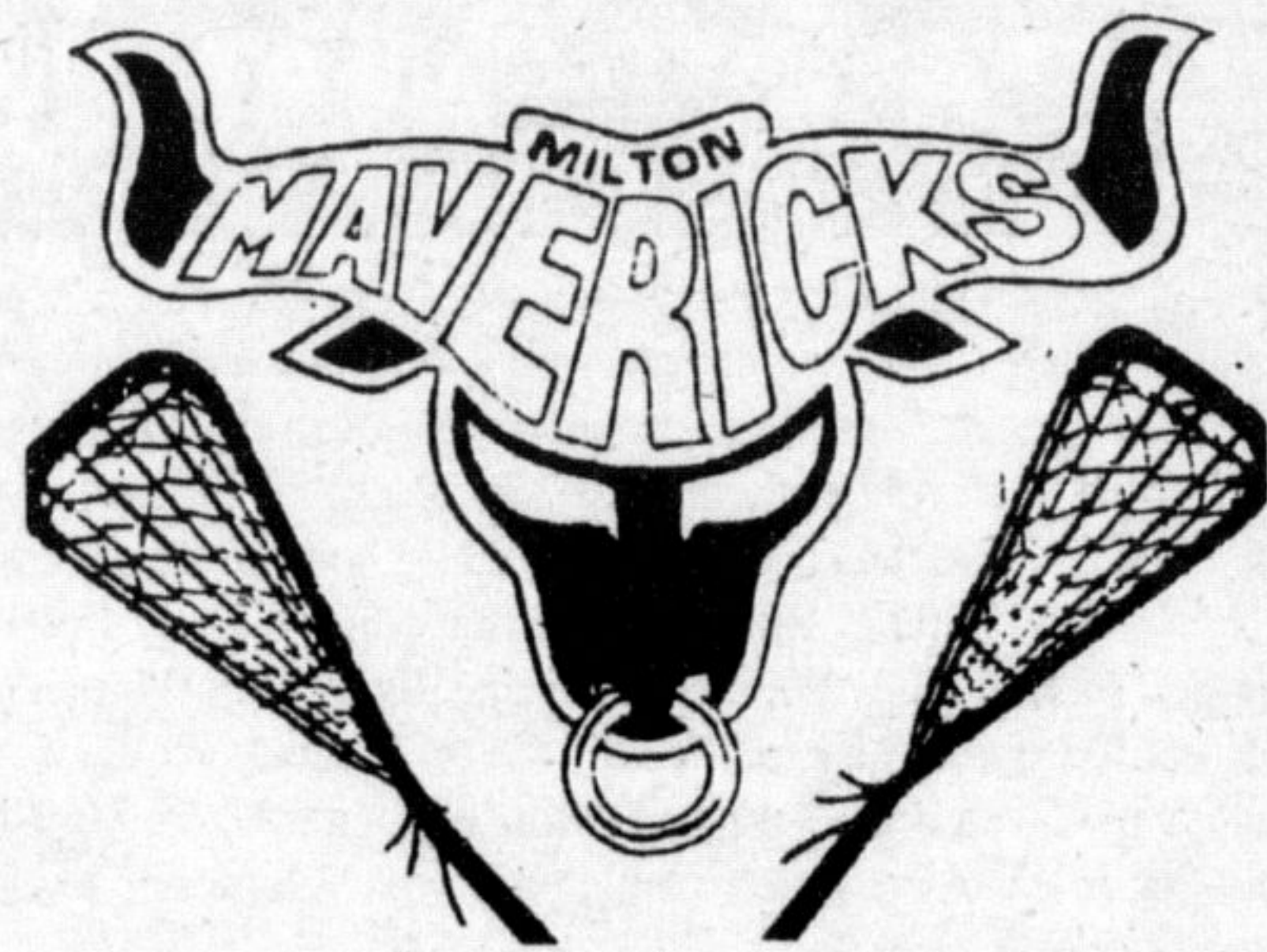
Among the veterans, Craig Hedley appears to be one of the few proven performers due back.

He was initially looking to jump to Jr. A this season, but because of work commitments will probably return to the fold.

"We can accommodate him more than they can at Jr. A," said Decaire. "We may not have him every night, but his presence and leadership will still help us a lot."

With the overage departure of Andrew Dowdell, Mike DeBoer heads into camp as the leading candidate for the number one goaltender position.

The Milton sophomore showed strongly at times last year, but will have to gain a little more consistency if he hopes to



maintain the starting spot.

Especially with several other promising netminders available, including Oakville's Adam Rivers — brought in as the third-stringer for last year's Founder's Cup.

"We've got a reasonably good returning crew and with what we've got from the intermediate team and the Orangeville Northmen (Jr. A affiliate) we can expect to be competitive," said Decaire. "I think rumours of our death have been greatly exaggerated."

For his part, Chandler appears equally optimistic about Milton's chances for a respectable run this season.

The new head coach — only the third in team history — isn't making specific predictions just yet, but said the primary goal is constant improvement.

"I want us to be better at the midway mark of the year than we are now and better by the end than we are halfway through," he said. "We're going to have to have a good transition game and be aggressive on defense."

Addressing Decaire's comments on his coaching style, Chandler agreed that utilizing his entire bench has always been a top priority.

Full lineup needed

He explained, "I go with a pace game, which isn't possible if you're only using 10 guys. If you've got 18 runners, you might as well use them."

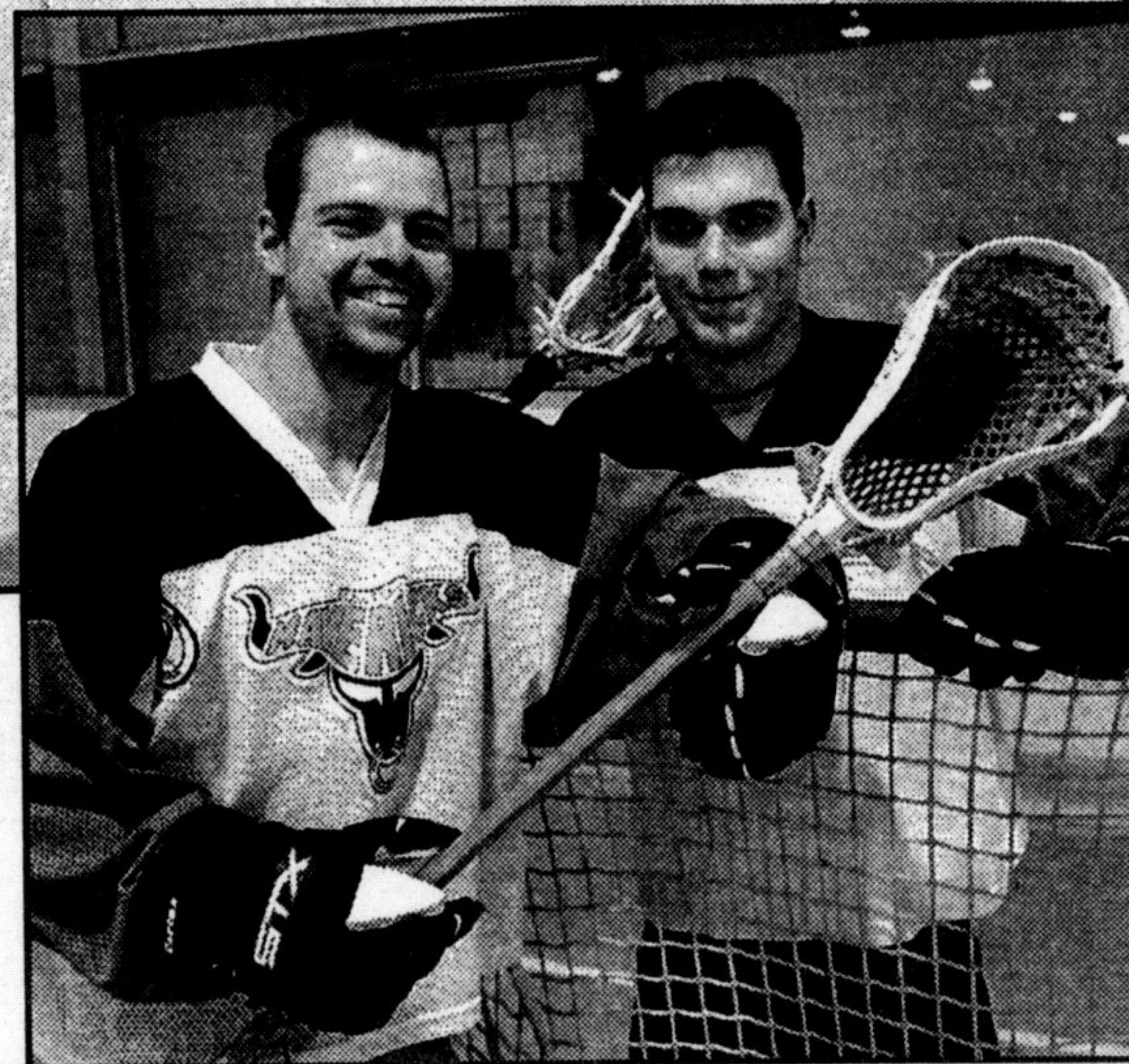
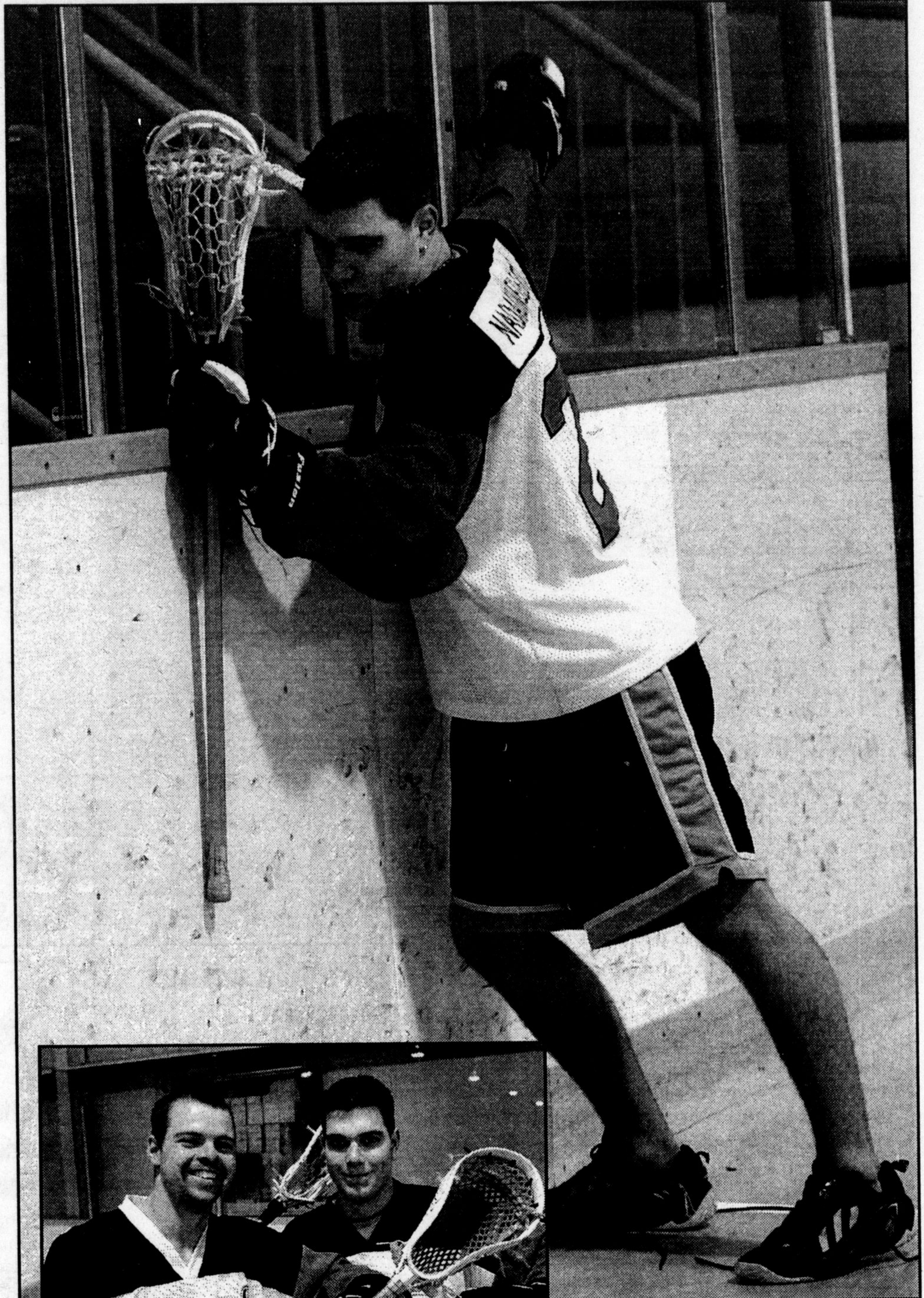
What depth the local team has will certainly be needed this year — as the season has been extended to 24 games and still features plenty of traveling.

Also, Milton will embark on its longest road trip ever in regular season play — six games over two weeks — which makes this year's rebuild that much tougher.

"I think we'll be okay. My biggest concern this year is that we get some more people in the stands," said Decaire.

They will open exhibition play Wednesday, Apr. 19 in Georgetown and host the Halton Hills Bulldogs Saturday, Apr. 22 at 2 p.m. at Tonelli Arena.

Their home opener is slated for Friday, Apr. 28 at 8 p.m. against Wallaceburg.



Jeff Hohendorf gets in some stretching at the Jr. B Mavericks' training camp Saturday. He and Mark Anderson (left) are among the returning veterans who will help the club during its rebuilding period this season.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

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