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FRIDAY APRIL 28, 2000

Milton baseball teams ready to rock

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Spring training is now complete and Milton's three high school baseball teams are ready to take on the best Halton Region has to offer — starting tomorrow during opening weekend play.

The following is a preview of each squad, their strengths and weaknesses, plus pre-season predictions by their respective skip-pers.

Team: Bishop Reding Royals

Manager: Joe Jurus

Coaches: John DeLuca, Terry Hughes

Last Year: Lost 5-2 to Oakville's St. Thomas Aquinas in first round of playoffs after 4-3 regular season

Hitting: With just about everyone back from 1999, BR should hold its own offensively and put together fairly decent numbers. Look for Taylor Lawton, Andrew Coe, Mark Antonelli and Niko Zentil to be bright spots in a still developing but quite respectable lineup.

Pitching: Somewhat of a question mark, with competent hurlers Mike Eichstedt and Bobby McKnight having transferred to Georgetown District High School and graduated respectively. But returnee Shawn Hill — a top major league prospect, who missed last year with an elbow injury — could more than fill the gap. However, he'll be throwing for several scouts this spring and may not be available on a full-time basis. The Royals will also be relying heavily on crafty sophomore Conan O'Brien.

Fielding: Should be solid up the middle with Chris Dumencu behind the plate, Lawton at shortstop and Mark Antonelli in centre field. Some platooning might have to be done at the other positions — especially the corners — but with a fairly deep team, there shouldn't be too many big holes. Newcomers Craig Hudak and David Lajuensee are among those who'll help plug things up.

The Bottom Line: Despite moving over to the tougher Richardson Division, Jurus is confident his troops can equal last year's regular season performance — and enjoy a little more playoff success. "I think it's definitely within our reach. Three losses is enough for this team," he said.

Opening Day: Saturday, Apr. 29. Doubleheader at Burlington's Nelson Park against Nelson at 9 a.m. and M.M. Robinson High School at noon.

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Team: E.C. Drury Spartans

Manager: Phil Duffy

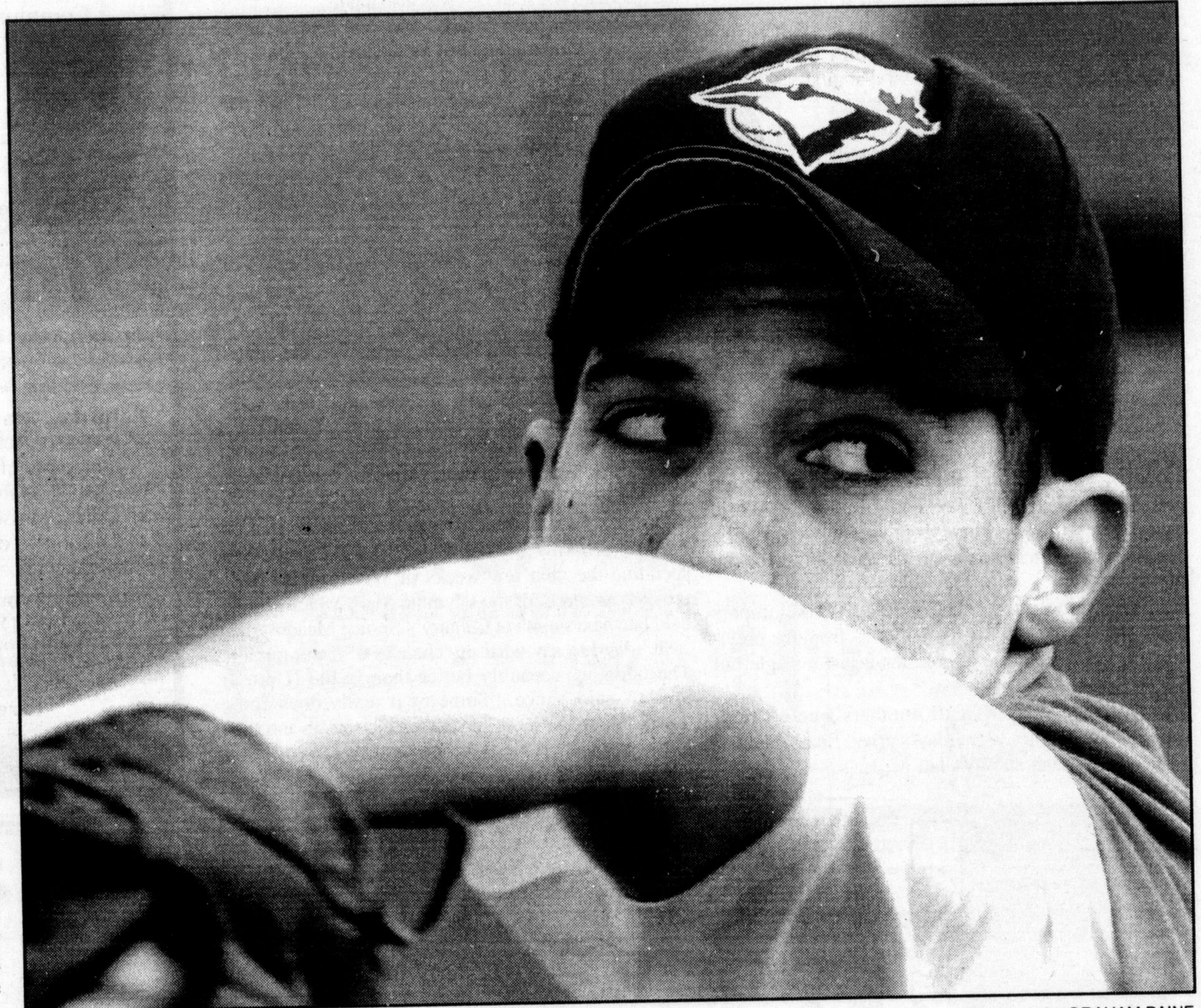
Coach: Freeman Nelson

Last Year: Lost 11-5 to Oakville's Q.E. Park in second round of playoffs after 5-3 regular season.

Hitting: "Of our five or six seniors, only Jack Turner was particularly productive last year," said Duffy, who doesn't expect a repeat of that problem in 2000. Merchant import Steve Schentag and fellow newcomer Jordan Jeans should help bolster a balanced lineup that already has some solid contributors. Mike Austen should once again be a consistent offensive threat.

Pitching: Drury doesn't sport any aces on the hill, but with seven or eight guys who can throw the ball they may be able to get by without a genuine dominator. The big question is will the bullpen's youth be a stumbling block in tight situations. Southpaw Jon Gleed and right-hander Chris Holmes should lead the way on the mound.

Fielding: Expect E.C. to be a better defensive club, particularly in the outfield with the addition of Jeans. Brother Evan Jeans and



File photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton District Mustang Bud Hall is one of many veterans who should help the local baseball team improve this spring. Milton District and the town's other two high school ball clubs — the Bishop Reding Royals and E.C. Drury Spartans — will start their seasons tomorrow.

catcher Austen are among the other bright spots in the field. Jed Cosby could also be a standout — if he can rebound from a recent shoulder injury.

The Bottom Line: Cautiously optimistic, Duffy knows the difference between sixth and second place in a tough Richardson loop could come down to just a win or two. With that said, he's aiming at a .500 or better regular season to secure a good playoff spot.

Opening Day: Saturday, Apr. 29. Doubleheader at Burlington's Ireland Park (D) against Notre Dame at 9 a.m. and Lord Elgin at noon.

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Team: Milton District Mustangs

Manager: Jason McGuffie

Coach: Damian Campbell

Last Year: Lost 5-3 to E.C. Drury in first round of playoffs after 4-4 regular season.

Hitting: While Nathan Perrott's departure leaves them without a bonafide power hitter, MD is expected to have significantly

more plate pop overall this year. Speedy outfielders Paul Duff, Michael Volpe and Jeff McLeod plus solid sluggers Reese Davies and Mike Leishman should combine for an impressive hit-and-run.

Pitching: Adam Finkbeiner and newcomer Jarrett Konkle will be the centerpieces for what should be an improved pitching unit. Duff and Volpe are among others who can give them quality innings. No stars in this department, but depth is certainly there.

Fielding: The Mustangs will be solid defensively and could sport one of the better outfields in the league with Duff, Volpe and McLeod. Davies and Bud Hall will help form a strong middle infield with Leishman, Andrew Neilson and John Melito filling out the ranks.

The Bottom Line: After a strong second half last year and with some key additions, McGuffie has high expectations. Among them are putting together a plus .500 regular season and making a serious run at the regional crown.

Opening Day: Saturday, Apr. 29. At Burlington's Millcroft Park at 9 a.m. against Acton and at Ireland Park (C) versus Lester B. Pearson at noon.

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