

Vince debuts at Worlds

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Ainsley Vince no longer fears the unknown.

Last August, Milton's star show jumper was almost relieved not to be competing at the Pan American Games.

Being Team Canada's alternate and not an actual participant was, oddly enough, a blessing — since she was more than a little leery about making her international debut at such a prestigious event.

Things have certainly changed in the past several months. As Vince puts it, she won't be overly disappointed if unsuccessful at qualifying for the 2000 Summer Olympics — but she won't feel unburdened either.

"The Pan Am Games weren't nearly as scary as I'd made them out to be," recalled Vince, who over the last couple of years has competed primarily with 10-year-old Dutch Warmblood Catch 22. "I remember thinking 'Man, I could have done this'. I guess the unknown is always scarier than the real thing."

The local rider's elevated confidence level shouldn't come as any kind of a surprise — considering her recent results.

In November Vince delivered back-to-back near flawless performances to help Canada win the Bank of Montreal Nations' Cup. She carried that high through the winter and into last weekend's Budweiser World Cup in Las Vegas — where there was no victory to be had, been definitely some encouraging signs for the future.

A rookie and one of the youngest show jumpers there, she continually cut her faults — from the previous round — in half and took down just a single rail during Saturday's Grand Prix.

Unfortunately her overall numbers weren't high enough to gain entry to Sunday's grand finale. Neither were international stalwart Ian Millar's — while fel-

low Canadian Mario Deslauriers, sensational throughout the weekend and seated fifth before the last round, was thrown from his horse around one of the final corners and knocked out of championship contention.

"Most riders look at their first World Cup appearance just as a chance to get their feet wet. To have improved with every round was certainly something positive I can take from it," said Vince.

Gaining experience on an especially large and technical indoor ring — an unusual combination, even on the international scene — was also a plus.

She remarked, "I'm 5'6" and when some of the jumps are about as tall as me, you know it's a big course. There was a lot of rail rubbing throughout the weekend and anytime he (Catch 22) seemed to rub one it came down."

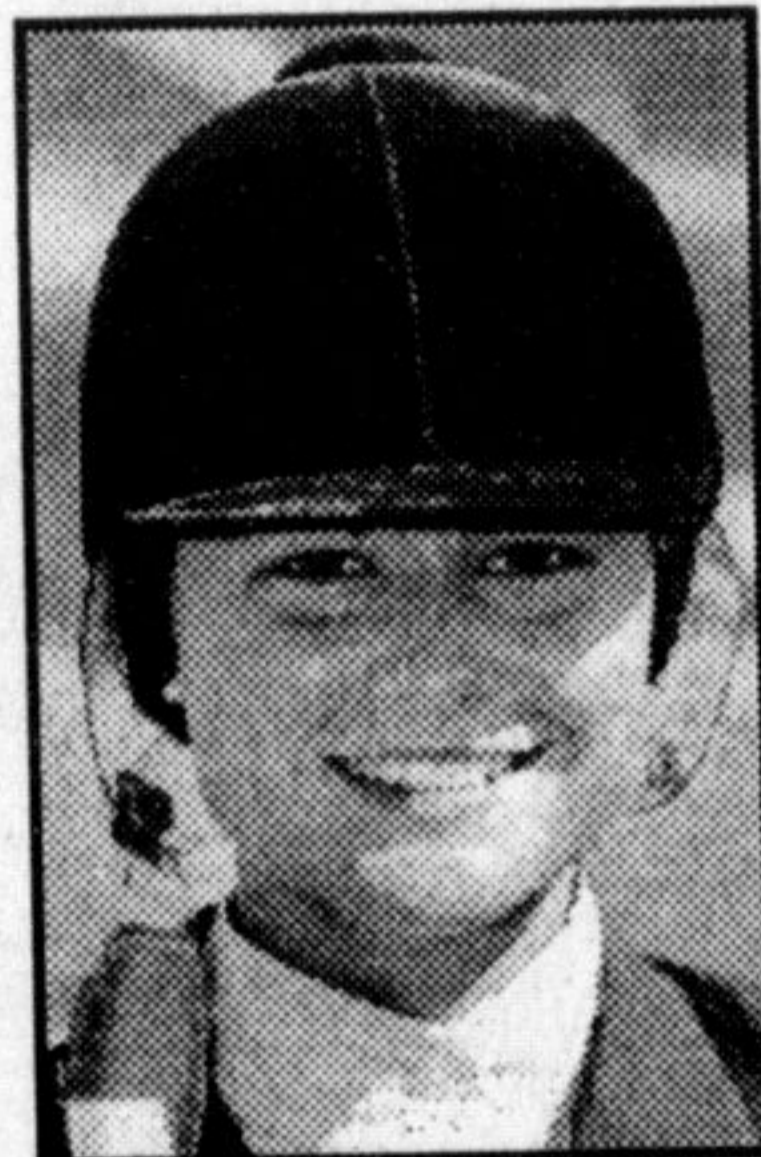
Vince's climb up the international show jumping ladder has been a rapid one, but in some ways she still sees herself as being behind in the game — at least in comparison to the world's elite riders.

"Most of the other young riders at the World Cup had competed at big shows in Europe and Florida throughout the winter. I hadn't done that, and didn't feel as prepared as they were," she explained. "Also,

many of them have more than one horse. In the grand scheme of things I'm certainly on the younger end of the age spectrum, but in some respects I could be even further along."

The Miltonian is making plans to achieve that — including taking on new trainer Laura Kraut and spending the next few weeks in Wisconsin to more properly prepare for the Olympic trials, which will be held late next month at Calgary's Spruce Meadows.

"It's hard to say what my chances of making it are. The odds are certainly better than in the (United) States," said Vince. "Some of it really does come down to luck. You can have a terrific season and then just a little misfortune at the wrong time can cost it for you. You just never know."



Ainsley Vince

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