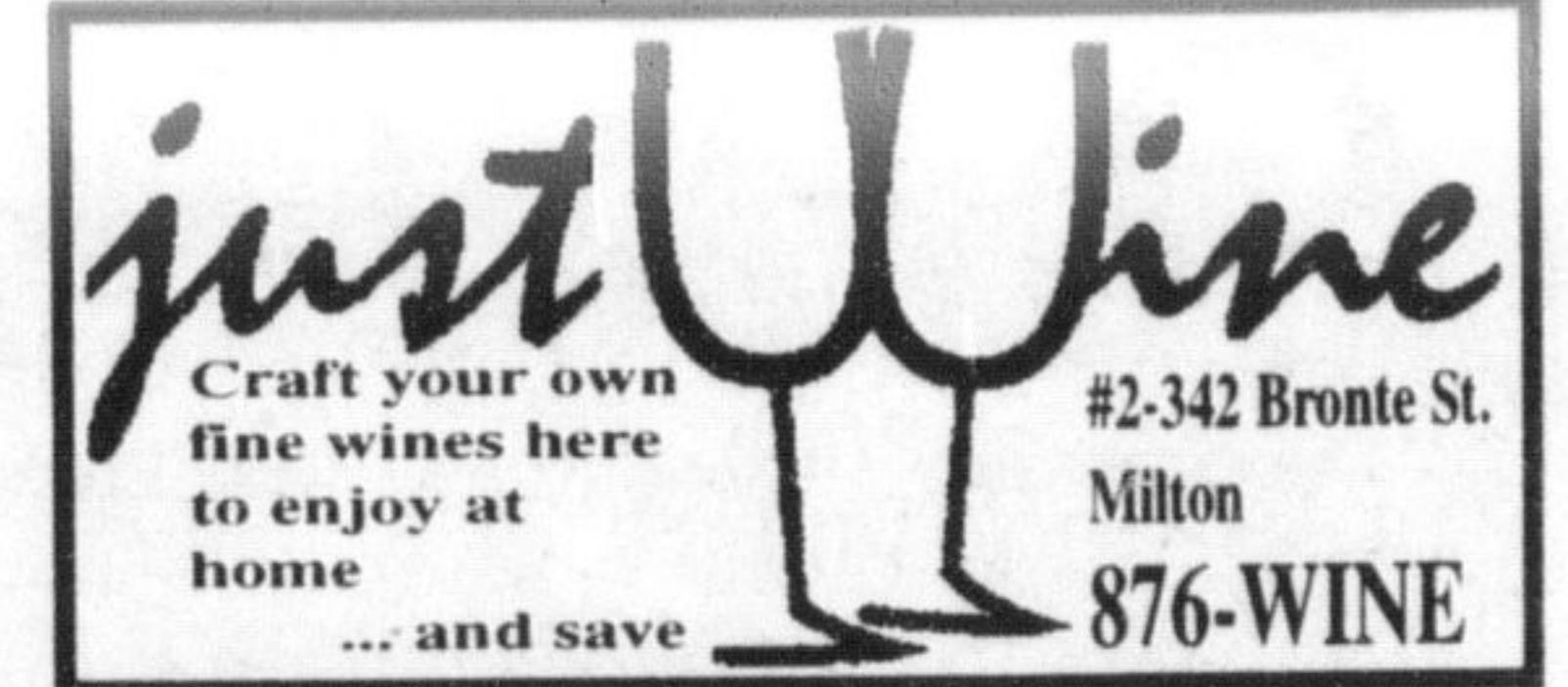




SPORTS



THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 19, 2000

Merchants dump Raiders in opener

By **STEVE LeBLANC***The Champion*

There's just something about opening night that brings out the best in the Milton Merchants.

Well perhaps that might be stretching it a bit, but the local juniors definitely have a knack for kick-starting the year in impressive fashion.

That trend continued against Georgetown Friday. Within the friendly confines of Memorial Arena, Milton delivered a robust performance pretty much from start to finish and knocked off last year's regular season conference champs 5-2.

The Merchants — who've won their last four season openers by a collective margin of 35-5 — took the lead a little past the midway mark of period one, and with the exception of a 36-second blip maintained it the entire evening en route to an inspired victory.

"At 5-on-5 we were by far the superior team. We came into tonight's game more organized and with less jitters than they (Raiders) did," remarked veteran centre Elliott Altberg.

Skipper Glenn Walsh said he was quite pleased with the younger players' efforts — particularly when it came to grit and positional play.

He added, "They showed us that we made some good (recruiting) decisions."

Cameron comes through in opener

Highlighting Friday's North Halton clash were a three-point campaign by highly gifted newcomer Flavio Faggioni and a 25-save night by Joel Cameron.

The seasoned goaltender was especially sharp when challenged downstairs and turned back every one of the dozen shots he faced in the second period to essentially nix Georgetown's comeback hopes.

"I'm still a little shaky out there, but I thought I got better as the game went on," said Cameron.

Offensively, Milton showed signs of putting the brakes on a recent trend they'd like nothing better than to completely scrap — that of an unproductive powerplay.

The Merchants didn't fare well with the man-advantage the past two years — last season in particular — but season-opening play suggests the team may be turning a corner in that department.

They didn't have an awful lot of powerplay chances, five to be exact, but capitalized twice with a front-line unit that included no less than three centremen whose puck-handling abilities rate among the division's best.

"We should have a very scary powerplay out there this season," said Walsh, referring to the joint potential of Altberg, Faggioni, Andy Rozak and gifted winger Shane Remenda.

"Teams are going to have to stay out of the penalty box against us."

The Raiders were largely successful in that respect, but couldn't seem to get into any kind of groove, due in equal parts to constant line shuffling and a lack of intensity from star captain Stace Page. Sophomore Tristin Fairbairn and Campbellville's Daryl Knowles — a rookie with Georgetown alongside fellow Milton area players Dan Rogers and Josh Vanderbreggen — did their scoring.

Faggioni, arguably the most promising newcomer to the West Conference this season, notched Milton's first goal and assisted on markers by Remenda and Rozak.

Also lighting the lamp were veteran James Coleman and former Port Hope Buzzer Ian LaBrash.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Merchant defenceman Rick Janco tries to clear Raider Mason Drew from in front while netminder Joel Cameron looks for the next shot during Friday's home opener at Memorial Arena. Milton won the game 5-2.

Assists went to Remenda, Rozak, Dan DeLong, Dan Bogner and Milton native Frank Fazio — who made some nifty passes and added a fine bit of corner work alongside second-line mates Rozak and LaBrash.

The Merchants didn't escape season-opening play completely unscathed however — as defenceman Chris Rook sustained a separated shoulder in the middle stanza which was his second (and certainly most serious) injury in as many encounters with Georgetown. He's the third rearguard now sidelined for the local club, who were already without the services of veterans Mike McGrane and Steve Schentag.

That leaves utility player Vince Guiducci, who signed with the team on Thursday, as a probable blueline mainstay for the next

little while and the coaching staff with two other holes to fill in support of healthy defencemen John Nadalin, Rick Janco and Chad Vinden.

Merchants notes: Backing up Cameron this year is returning sophomore Anthony Marshall, who should see some play this week during the team's first road trip of the year. Tonight Milton is in Streetsville at 7:30 p.m. while tomorrow evening they cross the border to face Buffalo at 8:15 p.m. They return home to battle Streetsville Friday ... Faggioni is currently riding a six-game scoring streak that goes back to the team's exhibition opener against Hamilton ... The Merchants are looking for families to billet a few out-of-town players. Anyone who can offer accommodations for the season is asked to call David Dermo at 875-4444.

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