



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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2000 — A great year for Milton athletes

By **STEVE LeBLANC***The Champion*

It was another great year for Milton — one of the best sports towns in Ontario.

Despite a relatively small population, teams and individuals continued to sparkle throughout the region, province, country and even the world.

Here are some sports highlights from 2000 in Milton, with apologies to those who earned distinction, but were unintentionally not included.

Best team

Larry Jaroslowski's E.C. Drury wrestlers finally reached the top of the mountain — capturing the team title at OFSAA. Knocking on the door with silver medals the previous two years, the perennial powerhouse squad dethroned defending champion Brampton Centennial 134-120. Leading the charge with individual gold medals were Mike Devries and Chad Merritt while securing bronze was John McCart.

Sharing runner-up status were a couple of teams from Bishop Reding. The junior boys soccer squad captured the regional crown — whitewashing St. Thomas Aquinas 2-0 to put an exclamation mark on an unbeaten season. Meanwhile, BR's senior football team won the Halton Region Division 1 title — blanking Loyola 7-0. The championship win came just four years after the local school first hit the gridiron.

Top female athlete

In a year filled with stellar performances — by any community's standards — mountain biker Chrissy Redden topped them all. The 33-year-old cyclist, who took up the sport less than a decade ago, reached the innermost sanctum of competition — the Olympics. She did so with an absolutely awesome qualifying campaign and then went on to prove that her making it to the big show was no fluke — taking eighth-place honours in Sydney, Australia. A flat tire cost her some ground at the international showcase and perhaps a shot at medaling.

Other first-place votes went to: Natasha Brancier (BMX racing), Alisha Lasswell (high jump), Jennifer Porenta (swimming), Heather Manbert-Serniuk (equestrian) Shawna Turner (triple jump) and Ainsley Vince (equestrian).

Top male athlete

Another tie this time around, although two new co-winners to share the spotlight.

Harry Barnes delivered a second straight age class championship performance at the triathlon nationals. Amidst nightmarish conditions he tamed the 1.5 km swim, 40 km bike, 10 km run course in a sizzling 2:30.17 to finish an amazing 14 minutes ahead of his closest challenger.

Meanwhile, Chad Merritt was equally impressive on the wrestling mat as an inspirational leader and star competitor with E.C. Drury. The graduating high school student put the finishing touches on a sensational season by taking gold at OFSAA and helping his Spartans grab the team title.

Other first-place votes went to: Alex Brancier (BMX racing), Mike Devries (wrestling), Gary Ferrier (wrestling), Darren Haydar (hockey) and Shane Ridley (baseball) and Joe Taglieri (judo).

Biggest disappointment

From a performance standpoint it had to be the Milton Merchants' severe backslide. The local juniors finished with their worst regular season record in several years — 29-13-3-3 — and made their earliest exit from the playoffs in almost a decade, losing four games to three to Burlington in the opening round.

This surely would have been a runaway winner had it not been for the Milton Maverick Jr. B lacrosse team folding up shop. A lack of player commitment and minimal chance of being competitive forced the club to cancel its 2000 season, just one year after hosting the nationals and coming away with silver.

Biggest improvement

Milton District High's senior football team rebounded from a winless season and posted a 4-2 record in Halton's Division 2. They went on to reach the semifinals, where they were beat by Burlington Central.

New additions

Joining the local sports scene, after a decade hiatus, were baseball's juniors and hockey's juveniles.

The boys of summer had a rough ride but their winter counterparts showed strongly with an impressive 10-6-3 league record and second-place finish during tournament play in Leamington.

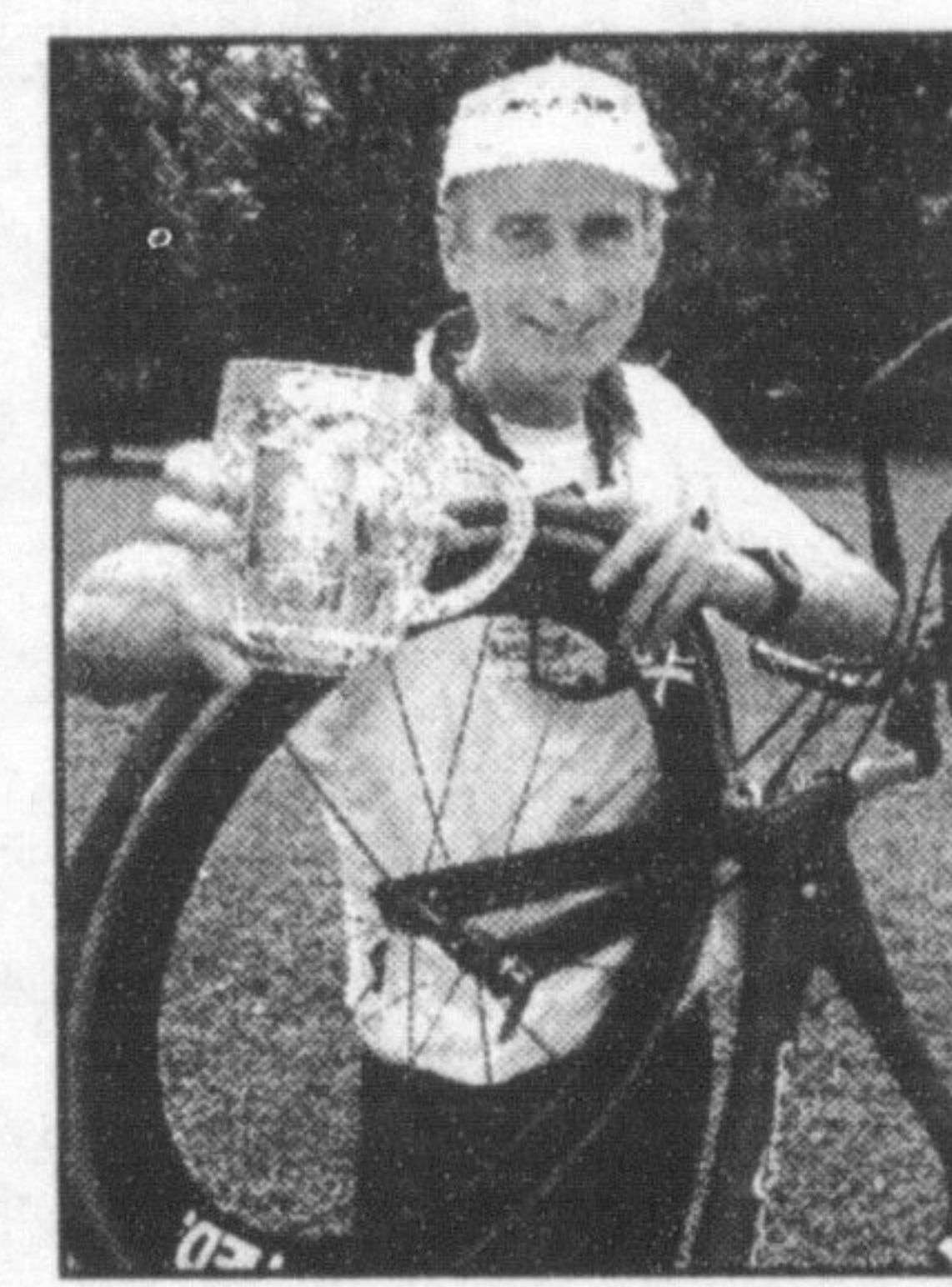
Milton's golden boys

Local horsemen Chris Christoforou and Ben Wallace took driver-of-the-year and trainer-of-the-year honours respectively from the Canadian Trotting Association.

Christoforou's O'Brien Award came on the heels of a record-breaking year in which he set a new single-season win total of 642 — absolutely annihilating the old benchmark of 534 — and steered Grinfromeartoe to victory at the Breeders Crown.

Wallace also enjoyed his most celebrated season at the racetrack.

His horses collected more than \$2 million in earnings while his prize performer — now retired Blissful Hall — led the way, becoming only the ninth horse in history to win Pacing's Triple Crown.



File photos by GRAHAM PAINE

E.C. Drury wrestlers Chad Merritt, John McCart and Mike Devries helped the school win OFSAA while mountain biker Chrissy Redden (above) and triathlete Harry Barnes enjoyed stellar seasons in their respective sports.

OMHA sweep

Milton minor hockey delivered an OMHA sweep with both the single A major peewees and single A major novices clinching the title.

The peewees did so with a 5-1 rout in Essex to cap a three-game sweep while the novices won their six-point series over Owen Sound with a 4-2 victory to complete three-game win streak. The younger squad then made it a sweep of its own by capturing Tri County honours as well.

Deja vu, times two

The HJM Insurance junior girls curling team equaled their efforts from the previous year by equating top marks at the provincial championships and then finishing fourth on the national front.

Changing of the guard

Merchants skipper Marty Williamson, on the heels of his worst season ever, stepped down after four years at the helm, two of which saw the club reach the All-Ontario finals. Replacing him was assistant coach Glenn Walsh.

Tough break

Professional pitcher Pat Lynch developed a tear in his right shoulder and underwent surgery — thus nixing his 2000 season. This after being traded to the Colorado Rockies, a move which

offered the right-handed hurler greater room for advancement.

Real pool shark

Jennifer Porenta took her swimming success to a whole new level. In addition to a provincial medal feast, the teenage competitor participated at the Olympic Trials — becoming the first local to do so.

Making a splash

Barefoot water-skier Paul Macdonald debut at the world championships and placed among the top 25 — certainly a respectable effort for his first time out.

Dual draftees

Twin towers Shayne and Jeremy Ridley were both picked up in Major League Baseball's 2000 entry draft. Shayne was drafted in the 19th round by the Baltimore Orioles while Jeremy was acquired by the Toronto Blues Jays in the 34th round.

Straight shooter

Alex Barrie was on target with a silver medal performance in archery at the Ontario Summer Games. The 14-year-old's second-place effort came just a few weeks after breaking his wrist.

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