



# SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY MARCH 13, 2001

## Merchants take 2-0 lead in Western finals

By **STEVE LeBLANC***The Champion*

It was a weekend of grand theft larceny for the Merchants.

First, Joel Cameron robbed the defending league champion Capitals of a conference finals opening victory at Memorial Arena Friday night — turning them back on nearly four dozen occasions and allowing the lifeless hosts to squeak by 3-2.

Then Milton delivered a slightly stronger dose of team work — as well as another great goaltending performance — to steal one in Brampton's barn the following night, rallying from a pair of early deficits on the way to prevailing 5-2.

So Glenn Walsh's Merchants now find themselves in the proverbial driver's seat and within two wins of reaching the Ontario Provincial Jr. A League's final four — with their best efforts yet to come.

"Now that we've got our nerves out we should play better," said captain John Nadalin Saturday.

Despite playing the opportunist and capitalizing on its key chances against Brampton, Milton looked subdued for much of the weekend and was out shot a whopping 84-30.

Cameron — to say the least — was the equalizer.

In front of a series opening capacity crowd, the graduating stopper highlighted his impressive playoff run with a 45-save gem — miraculously giving his teammates the win on a night when they tested ace Capital Danny Gould a pathetically low 11 times.

On Saturday, shots on net were again lopsided — favouring Brampton 37-19. Cameron's 26 straight saves through periods two and three opened the door to a comeback victory for the Merchants.

"Joel's playing some of the best hockey I've ever seen from him," remarked general manager Nick Slawson.

Added Nadalin, "What can you say, he's been Mr. Playoffs."

While goaltending's been the main story so far in West Conference finals action, a surprising sidebar is the unexpected lack of intensity and physical presence on the part of Brampton.

The Capitals have always used their smaller ice surface to overpower opposing teams — but came up extremely short in that regard Saturday.

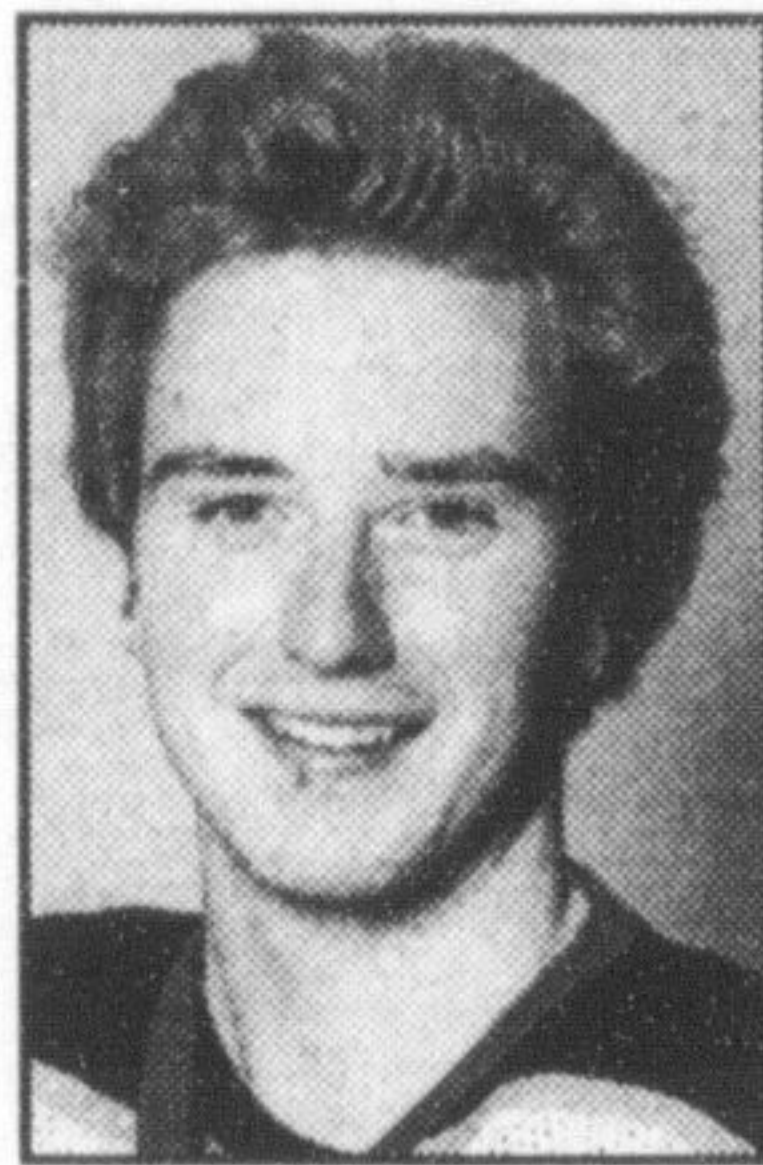
While thoroughly outchancing their guests, they were far from intimidating in the corners and didn't create nearly enough traffic in front of Cameron — who for all his brilliance this past weekend didn't have to contend with many rebounds.

Meanwhile, Milton made the most of its second opportunities.

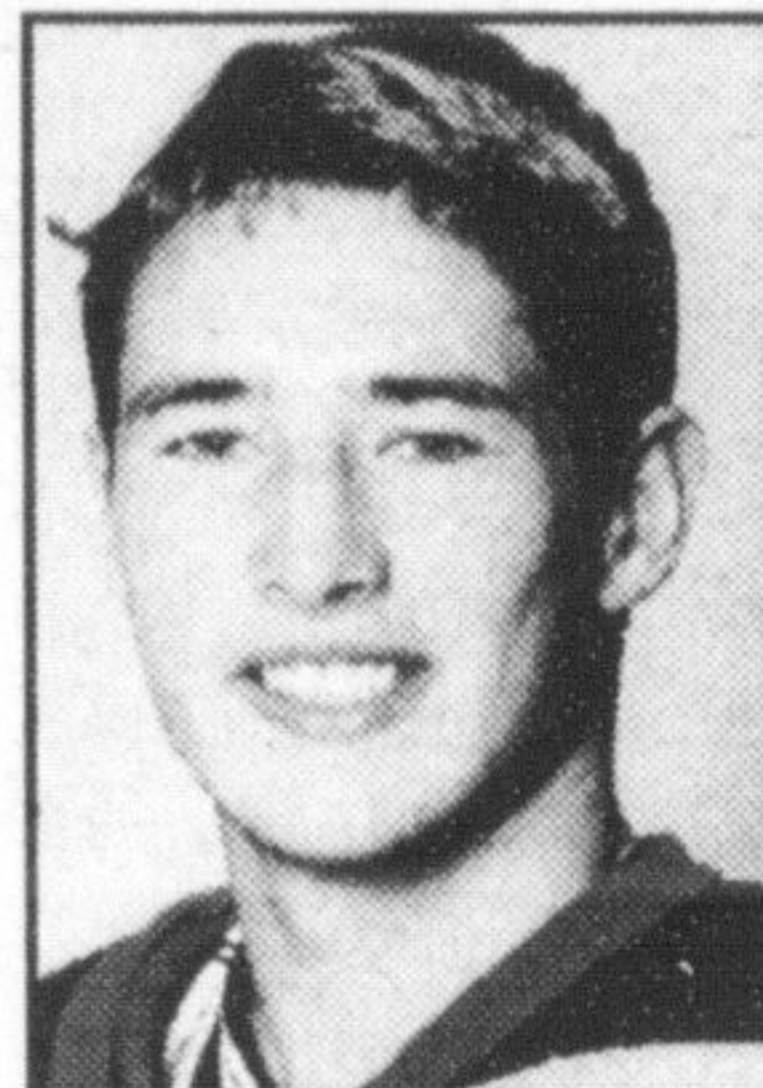
Leading in that department was James Coleman. The gritty winger sank both game-winning markers via short-range leftovers and capped the weekend with a shorthanded empty netter Saturday.

Andy Rozak also stood out in game two with a four-assist effort to lift his team leading playoff point total to 28 — inching him ever closer to Darren (Mini) Haydar's 50-point mark established during the 1998 All-Ontario championship run.

Kevin Arruda and Dan DeLong each had a goal and an assist



**Joel Cameron**  
• turned back 80  
of 84 shots



**James Coleman**  
• 3-goal weekend



Photo by BRYON JOHNSON

**Merchant Ben Frank reaches for a loose puck while teammate Andy Rozak contends with a pair of Capital opponents during game two of the Western Conference finals in Brampton Saturday. Milton won the game 5-2 to take a two-games-to-none lead in the best-of-five division championship series.**

Saturday while Ben Frank — promoted to the top line to replace an underachieving Andrew Francone — also lit the lamp.

Brampton's goals were both deposited by freshman Tom Zanoski.

The Merchants went 2-for-3 on the powerplay and killed off all six of their shorthanded stints, including four in the third period.

On Friday, Coleman one-timed a snapshot past a less than stellar Gould four minutes into the final frame that stood up as the winning tally.

Francone and Rick Ferroni were the other marksmen, while replying for the visitors were Jeff Hristovski and John Winstanley — who missed game two to attend a family function. On both nights, his top scoring line was effectively neutralized by Milton's checking unit.

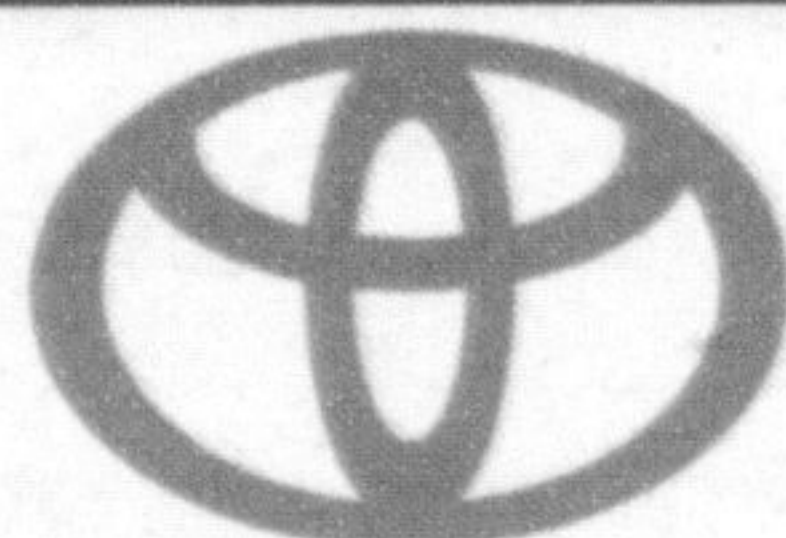
Cameron's crafty cage work aside, game one was an absolute

bore — with little in the way of physicality, creativity or even effort.

The series continues tonight in Milton. Game time, as always, is 8 p.m. If victorious, the Merchants will have an opportunity to sweep in Brampton Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

If necessary, game five will be played in Milton Friday.

**Merchant notes:** Rookie Frank Fazio played both games this past weekend and assisted on Francone's game one marker ... Milton has not lost at home since game three against Bramalea ... Joel Cameron hasn't allowed more than three goals in any of his last 10 starts and now sports a post-season goals-against average of 2.50 ... Should the Merchants dethrone Brampton, they'll likely square off against ex-bench boss Marty Williamson and his powerhouse Newmarket Hurricanes in the Ontario Provincial Jr. A League semifinals.



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