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Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Doug Janjevich (left) and Jeff Haydar — who toiled with the NCAA's Brown Black Bears and New Hampshire Wildcats respectively last season — are preparing for tryouts with ECHL clubs later this month.

Milton duo prepare for tryouts with East Coast League clubs

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Milton is already set to make its presence felt in the OHL. And it could very well do likewise later this fall at the semi-pro level.

Hopes for that rest with former Merchants Jeff Haydar and Doug Janjevich — who're ready to prove themselves at tryouts with East Coast Hockey League (ECHL) clubs.

Haydar — captain of the Merchants' 1997/98 squad that made it all the way to the national Royal Bank Cup — will look to crack the semi-pro ranks with New Jersey's Trenton Titans, that fellow Miltonian Scott Bertoli toiled with last year and helped to the league championship finals.

The 24-year-old centre brings a little bit of everything to the table, including a solid physical presence — which he offered last year as of a member of University of New Hampshire's checking line.

While best known among local hockey circles for his leadership with the Merchants, Haydar says the past two years with Laurier University and then UNH have prepared him for a potentially tough grind ahead with Trenton.

"You're on the ice every day (at university), so it helps you

get ready for a tougher schedule," he said.

Meanwhile, Janjevich's hopes for a semi-pro career will come further south in Florida, where he'll attempt to catch on with the Everblades.

The third-year club is run by former Miltonian Craig Brush, whose both the general manager and president.

Janjevich's ECHL tryout follows a strong senior year with the NCAA's Brown Black Bears.

He and linemate Matt Kohanskay accounted for more than half of the team's offense — and when they didn't get on the scoreboard Brown rarely pulled out the win.

While Janjevich's biggest weapon has always been speed, the 23-year-old winger has bulked up a little since his days with the Merchants and feels ready to tackle the physical challenges of semi-pro hockey.

"I'll always have to cling to my speed, but I think I'm able to mix it up a little more these days," he suggested.

Both Haydar and Janjevich will report to their respective camps near the end of September.

Bertoli could united with Haydar in Trenton should he not crack the Washington Capitals' AHL affiliate in Portland — where he's earned a tryout.

Merchants GM impressed with team's blueline

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

The 2001/02 Merchants should make a stronger case for the defense.

This according to general manager Nick Slawson, who while quick to admit this year's blueline doesn't have a premier performer like graduating captain John Nadalin, feels there's more depth and skill in place than last season.

"I think one through seven there's a higher quality on this year's team," said Slawson. "Overall, there's more mobility and more skill."

So far local fans haven't had much opportunity to see the team's new blueline in full force, since Matt Bartlett missed the tail-end of exhibition play with a sprained ankle.

The 20-year-old Jr. B graduate — a rugged defenceman who helped Cambridge win the Sutherland Cup two years ago — will be back in the lineup for tonight's home opener and will provide both physicality and experience on the point.

Said Milton's GM, "He moves the puck really well and makes great outlet passes. I think his experience with having won the Sutherland Cup will lend itself well to our arena."

Goaltending, he believes, is another area where the West Conference champs have improved. While starter Trevor Battaglia and rookie Sean Samuel have a way to go to prove themselves like Joel Cameron did in last year's playoff run, the pair have been rock solid the past two weeks and have yet to surrender what would be considered a 'soft goal'.

Offensively, Slawson would have liked to have another proven goal scorer in place at this point — not to mention an enforcer to take care of his skilled but small forwards.

Nevertheless, there's a lot of assets up front this year and the recent additions of David Ovcjak and Wes Martin have added size to skill.

Milton wasn't able to showcase either attribute during their exhibition-closing clash in Vaughan Monday.

The game was called after about eight minutes due to dangerously soft ice. The two sides chose to square off in a shoot-out for the rest of evening and the Merchants won the impromptu contest 6-5.

The Merchants, who finished pre-season with a 2-2-1 record, were still deciding on a captain and assistants this past week but were expected to have them in place by tonight, when they open up against the Burlington Cougars.

Milton's home opener kicked off a hectic six-games-in-10-nights stretch that'll be capped with three games in as many nights during the College Weekend.

Merchant notes: Coach Glenn Walsh and assistants Mike Kalapaca and Dan Sales are all back to guide this year's Merchants ... Former Merchant Frank Fazio, released last month, has been skating with Burlington while Rick Ferroni has apparently hooked up with a prep school in the United States.





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