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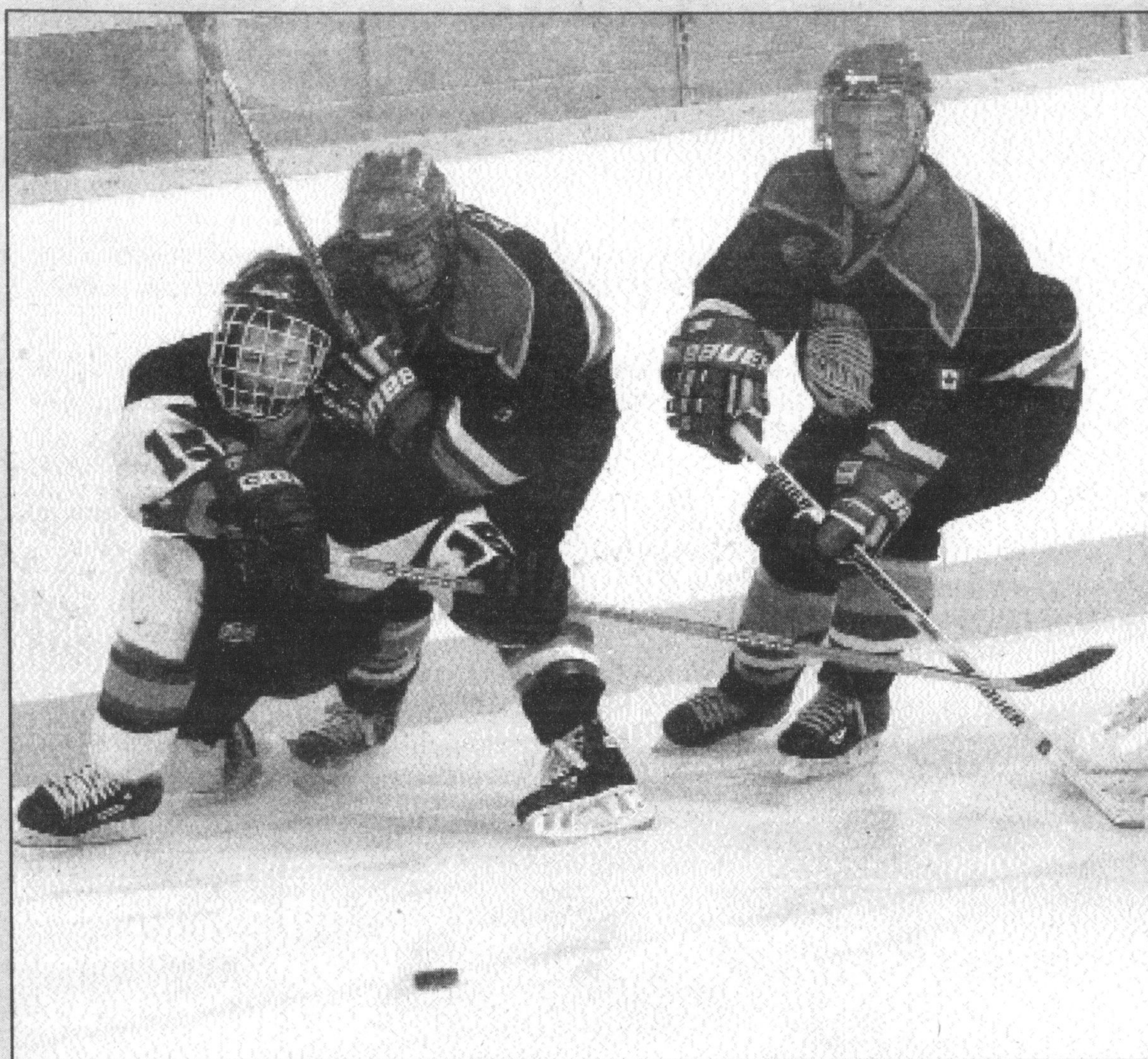


Photo by HERB GARBUTT

Merchant defenders look to clear the zone during Saturday's 8-6 loss in Georgetown. The team will look to improve on last weekend's lacklustre defensive efforts when they head into Oakville tonight for a 7:45 p.m. start.

'Need to keep things simple,' says Merchants GM of club's defence

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

The Merchants' defence certainly left a lot to be desired last weekend.

But general manager Nick Slawson suggested that probably had more to do with a thinned-out blueline unit trying to do too much rather than a lack of effort.

"With two veterans out of the lineup, a few guys were pushed up in the rotation and maybe asked to do some things they weren't quite ready for," Milton's GM said.

While Rick Janco's Sunday return has the club's defense back to near full strength — minus only Chris Krieg, who'll be out for for six to eight weeks with a torn MCL — Slawson said a 'simpler game-plan may be needed while the new blueline

corp, which includes two 16-year-olds, learns the Jr. A ropes.

"They've just got to concentrate on getting it out (of our end) and letting the forwards do the work," said Slawson.

Milton had plenty of trouble doing that last weekend, particularly during Saturday's 8-6 humbling at the hands of the Georgetown Raiders.

With Krieg and Janco on the sidelines, successful breakout attempts and completed lead passes were in rather short supply. Nevertheless, Slawson still thinks this year's defense is — top to bottom — more balanced than last season.

But there may be more of a learning curve required as well, and a relaxed schedule this week and next should allow for that to begin. Said Slawson, "We're not that busy (with games) right now, so it's a good time to get in some more teaching."

Senior 'Stangs eclipsed by OT in home opener

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

The old adage that football is a game of inches took on a whole new meaning during the senior Mustangs' home opener last Friday.

On a chilly and rain-soaked afternoon at Milton District High School, Keith Pearce's Division 2 hosts and the opposing Oakville Trafalgar Devils simply suffocated each other in a defensive slugfest that was decided by a measly one point — and not until overtime had nearly expired.

With under a minute left in the extra session, the visitors secured a single to eclipse the 'Stangs 8-7. A lengthy pass and ill-timed roughing penalty by the defense set up the winning play.

Said Pearce, "The score was very much indicative of the game — a defensive struggle played between the 20-yard lines."

MD took their guests to overtime after knotting things up early in the fourth quarter. Veteran quarterback Mark Grimwood did so with a 20-yard end-zone pass to receiver Lewis Delpratt. Justin Preece kicked the extra point.

The tying touchdown followed an effective ground game in the third quarter — which was somewhat surprising given that ace running back Greg Van Es was still out with a knee injury, sustained during the team's controlled scrimmage showcase the previous Friday.

But Brandon Byers, a first-year senior, picked up the slack and made a number of impressive gains throughout the day.

"We got it (rushing) going in the third quarter, particularly up the right side," said Pearce. "Brandon definitely moved the ball well."

Grimwood complimented that with several completions — mostly to Delpratt — while defensively MD enjoyed standout performances from middle-linebacker Simon Brennan and safety Mark Pereira.

Oakville Trafalgar' lone major was scored in the second quarter on a 20-yard reverse sweep.

The 'Stangs could have Van Es back in the lineup as early as next Thursday, Oct. 4 when they host Oakville's Iroquois Ridge Trailblazers. In the meantime, they'll look to other offensive weapons in an effort to square their record this afternoon at Burlington's Lester B. Pearson.

Atoms win opener

Milton's AA atoms sent the Brampton Battalion marching at Memorial Arena Monday.

A pair of second-period goals plus an overall gutsy effort was enough for the hosts to take their season opener 2-0.

Wade McGinnis led offensively — setting up the initial deposit by Scott Stover and then padding the lead himself with just six seconds remaining in the middle stanza.

Assisting on the insurance marker was Brayden Abraham.

Taylor Prestidge stood tall between the pipes for the shutout while his teammates took just two minor penalties all night and matched their guests in terms of both physicality and quality scoring chances.



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