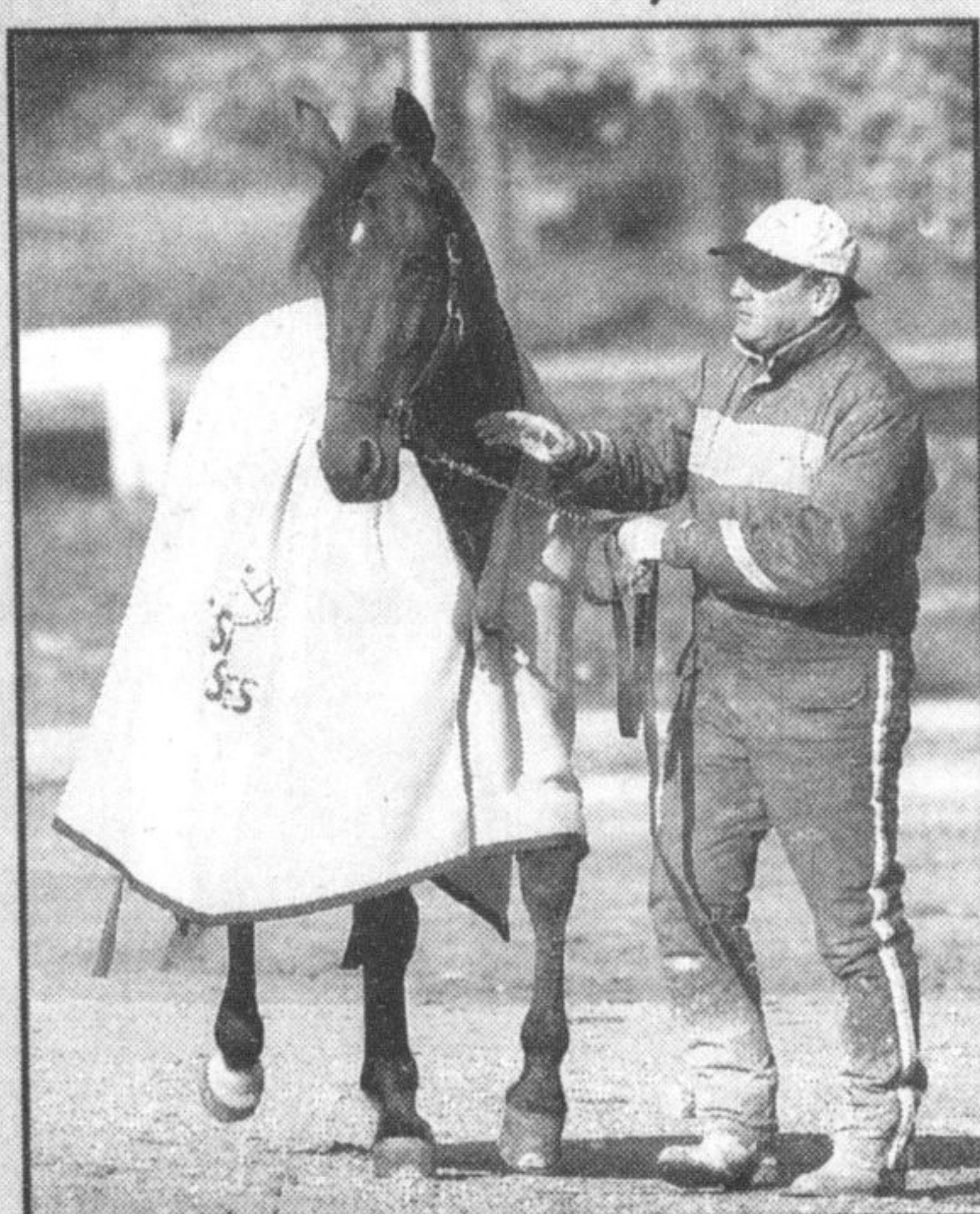
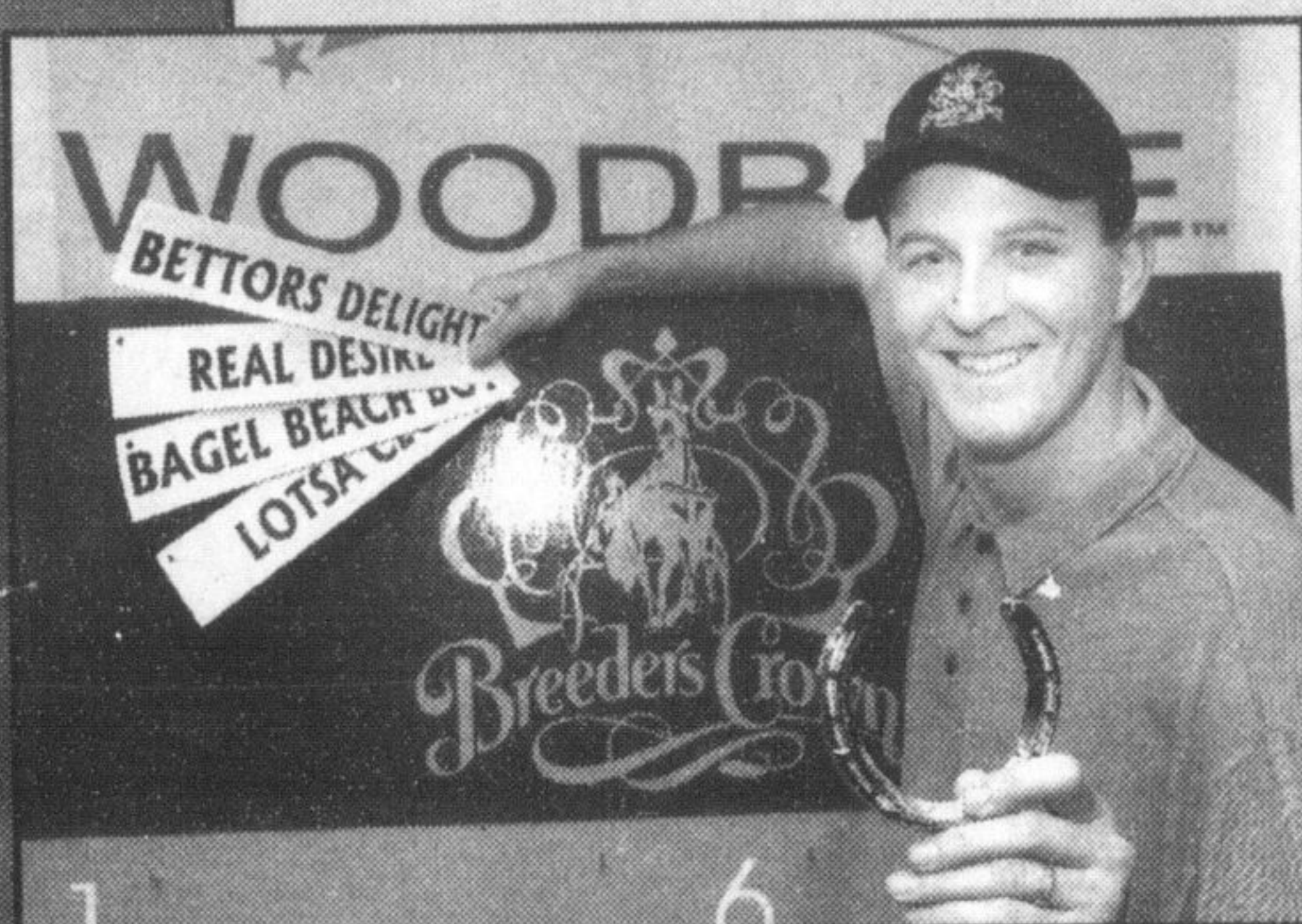
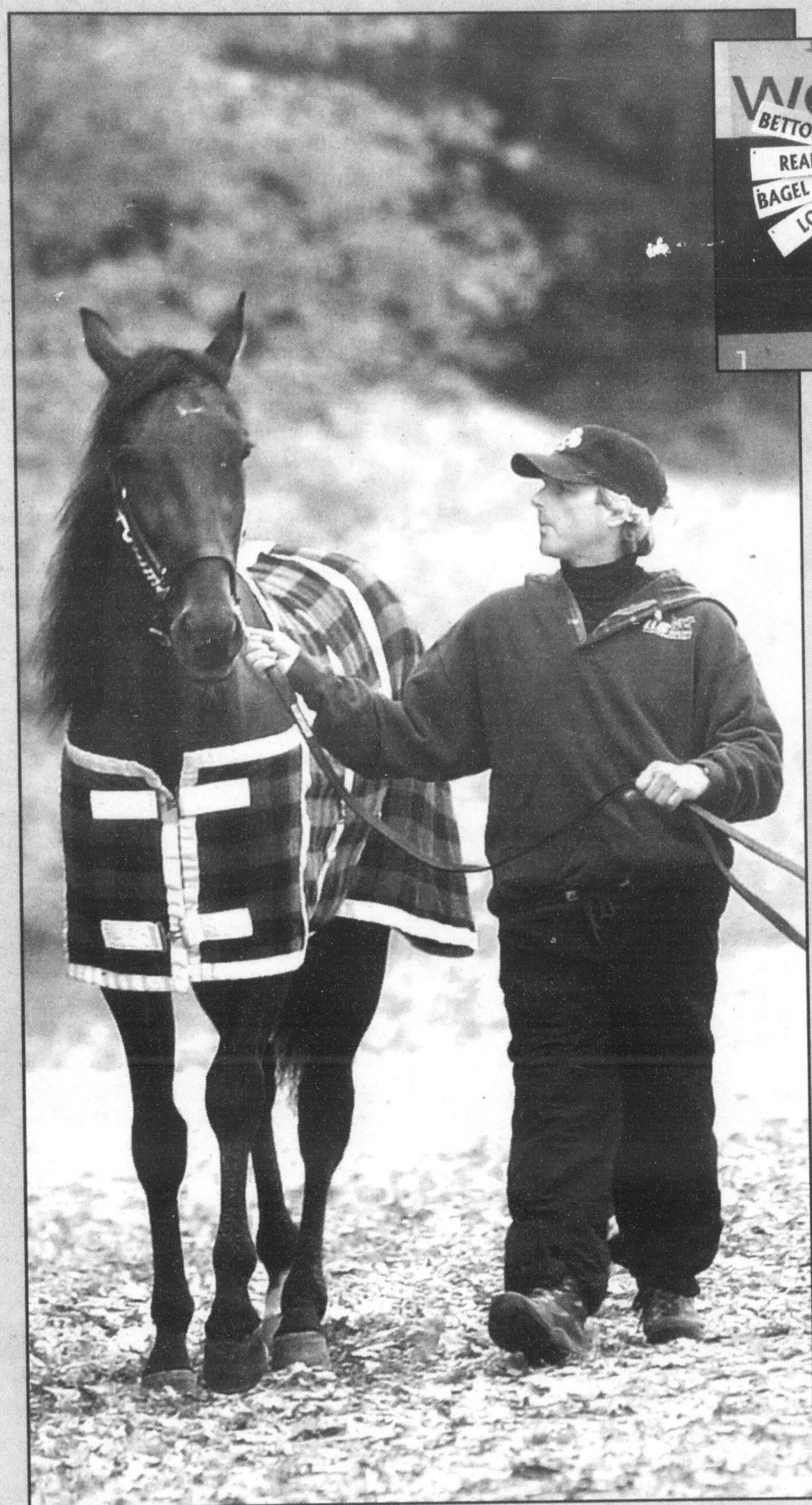




SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

FRIDAY OCTOBER 19, 2001



Locals set for battle

Local trainers Blair Burgess (left) and Ben Wallace (above) exercise Real Desire and Yankee Fribble respectively in preparation for tonight's Breeders Crown at Woodbine Racetrack. Meanwhile Blue Jays reliever and horse owner Dan Plesac (top) holds up names of some of tonight's favourites — including local heavyweights Bettors Delight and Real Desire, which will battle it out in the three-year-old pacing colt division.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton delivers gutsy effort, but bested by Blues

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Whether Merchant coaching changes will bring lasting benefits is still open for debate.

But they did pay out immediate dividends in Bramalea Tuesday.

In their first game under co-owner turned bench boss Dave Gagner, Milton juniors offered something to build on with their finest performance — work ethic wise — this month.

Unfortunately, that wasn't quite enough to put the brakes on their current skid. Poor line changes, careless passing and mediocre netminding were just too much to overcome — as the struggling visitors were outdistanced 7-5.

"From an effort standpoint, it was (better)," said a cautiously optimistic Gagner. "We did make a lot of poor decisions that we have to eliminate, but in terms of determination and willingness to stay in the game we were solid."

The Merchants erased three separate leads before falling to the third-place Blues. Michel Bond and Dan Carcillo each tallied twice while their cohorts battled for loose pucks with — this year at least — unparalleled intensity.

On the down side, rookie Sean Samuel was only marginally better than during his debut as the starting goalie three nights earlier in Brampton. A few too many botched breakout attempts by a still vulnerable and fatigued defensive unit kept the young tender busy for much of the night.

Vince Guiducci, Milton's most seasoned rearguard in the lineup these days, left in the third period with recurring back spasms. Filling the gap down the stretch was all-purpose interim captain Dan Bognar.

For the second straight game against Milton, Bramalea's Scott Neil scored the game winner inside the final two minutes of the middle stanza. He also sank the empty-net insurance marker.

Former Merchant Vince Laise chipped in a goal and an assist for the Blues.

Milton's other goal was potted by Rich Meloche. Erin Shamrock call-up and Milton native Andrew Kirkland drew a pair of helpers and looked rather impressive in his Jr. A debut.

"He was solid out there. He handled the puck well and offered good positional play," Gagner said of the young forward.

The Merchants' five goals matched their output from all three games last week. Shots on goal favoured Bramalea 38-33.

Merchant notes: Oakville rep coach Brett Shepley has been brought on board to be Gagner's assistant ... Michel Bond's first goal against the Blues was a powerplay marker, the first in four games for Milton. His second goal was shorthanded, number three for the team this year ... Milton will look to snap a four-game losing streak tonight at home against last-place Buffalo.

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