

# Merchants falter against lowly Cougars

*Milton's woeful powerplay leads to winless weekend*

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

*The Champion*

The Merchants' hopes of securing a top four finish — and the extra first-round home game that goes with it — are fading fast.

And they'll all but completely disappear with another winless weekend like the one that just passed.

A 1-for-15 powerplay campaign, spotty goaltending and careless breakout passing conspired against the defending conference champs during a surprisingly unsuccessful home-and-home series against the second-last place Burlington Cougars.

It ended in especially lacklustre fashion at Central Arena Sunday.

Milton botched three two-man advantages and were uninspired through lengthy stretches of the night on the way to losing 4-1.

The Merchants' blueline unit offered their hosts a number of breakaway chances — one of which was converted for a backbreaking shorthanded goal late in

the second period.

Trevor Battaglia was flawless over the balance of the contest to keep his team within striking distance, but a lack of cohesion and physical presence prevented even the faintest trace of a comeback bid.

Rick Carriere made the lone deposit — finishing a goal-mouth scramble midway through the evening. Assisting on the play was dynamic newcomer Tristan Senior and rookie Rich Meloche, who picked up his first point in four games.

Burlington's goals were delivered by Jamie Bigger, Steven Johnston, James Maida and Patrick Rowan.

## Huge comeback needed

At Memorial Arena Friday, Milton needed a little of its dependable home-ice drama to stave off defeat. Down 5-0 late in the first due to a horrendous start by Battaglia, the Merchants rallied to tie 5-5 — punctuating their comeback with a penalty shot deposit in the dying moments of regulation.



Providing the heroics with an impressive backhand fake was Senior, who also initiated the reversal of fortune before first intermission. Milton's other goals were posted by Michel Bond, Shawn Mole and David Ovcjak. Vince Guiducci and Rick Janco each drew two assists.

Leading for the Cougars with a hat-trick was Shane Jooris.

**Merchant notes:** Senior has figured in nine of Milton's 11 goals since his arrival two weeks ago ... The Merchants are undefeated in their last seven home games but have scored just one goal in their last two road trips ... Miltonian Frank Fazio picked up an assist for Burlington Friday ... Captain Kevin Arruda's return from a broken ankle is taking longer than expected. He'll likely be out until the Newmarket Showcase ... Goaltender Ryan McManus received a five-game suspension for inadvertently shooting the puck into the mesh in Hamilton December 8. However, since the puck didn't actually enter the stands, team management is appealing the call and looking to have his suspension shortened ... Milton will look to end a three-game winless streak tonight at home against second-place Bramalea. Game time is 8 p.m. The Merchants host Mississauga Friday and are in Georgetown Saturday.

*Please fax your team reports and sports story ideas to Steve LeBlanc at 878-4943, or drop them off anytime at our office, 191 Main St. E.*

# Jeff Haydar makes smooth transition to semi-pro ranks

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

*The Champion*

Jeff Haydar spent most of his junior and university hockey career at the top of the standings.

And that trend has continued — thus far anyway — with a jump up to the semi-pro ranks this year.

The Merchants' former captain is now toiling with the Odessa Jackalopes — who currently sit first in their south west division and tied for fourth overall in the Central Hockey League.

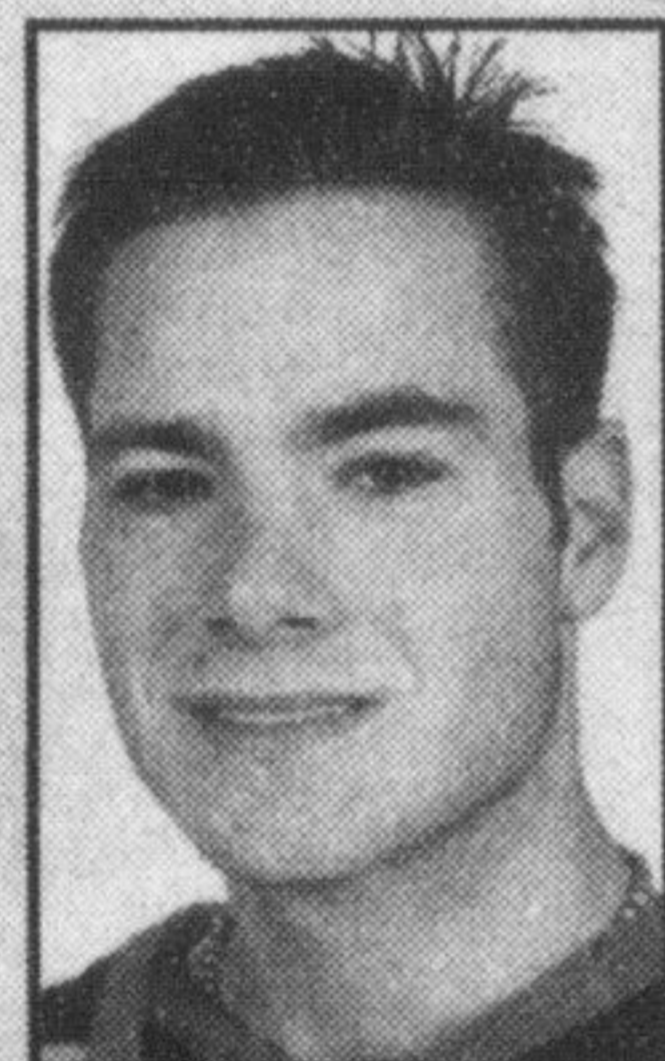
The West Texas team has been particularly tough to beat on home ice and boast a season record of 14-7-4.

Milton's 24-year-old centre has had a significant hand in that success — averaging about a point a game following a rather quiet first month with the Jackalopes.

"It took me about eight or nine games to really break in, but since then I've adapted pretty well," said Haydar.

His impressive transition can be largely attributed to a well-rounded game — which becomes even more crucial at the semi-pro level, where teams can only dress 18 players compared to 20 at the junior and college ranks.

Explained Haydar, "It's a developmental league, so you're not supposed to have guys riding the bench. You need guys to be accountable out there,



Jeff Haydar

in all types of situations."

That's been the former provincial junior champ's strong suit in many years — including this one, where he's being called on for most important penalty kills and face-offs in Odessa's end.

Haydar has also earned some powerplay time and been a regular contributor in the offensive zone as well. He's lit the lamp

eight times — once for a game winner earlier this month against state rival Amarillo — and sits with 13 points.

He had an offensively quiet weekend that ended with a 3-1 loss to former Merchant Luch Nasato's Memphis RiverKings Saturday. This snapped the team's three-game win streak — made possible by Friday's 4-2 decision over San Angelo.

"There's certainly a lot of teams here (in Texas) but there's not much to do (in your spare time). We play a lot of golf when the weather's good and watch a lot of movies when it's bad," said Haydar.

His Jackalopes have a three-games-in-three-days stretch beginning Thursday in Oklahoma City. They return home to face Wichita and Amarillo before the Christmas break.

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