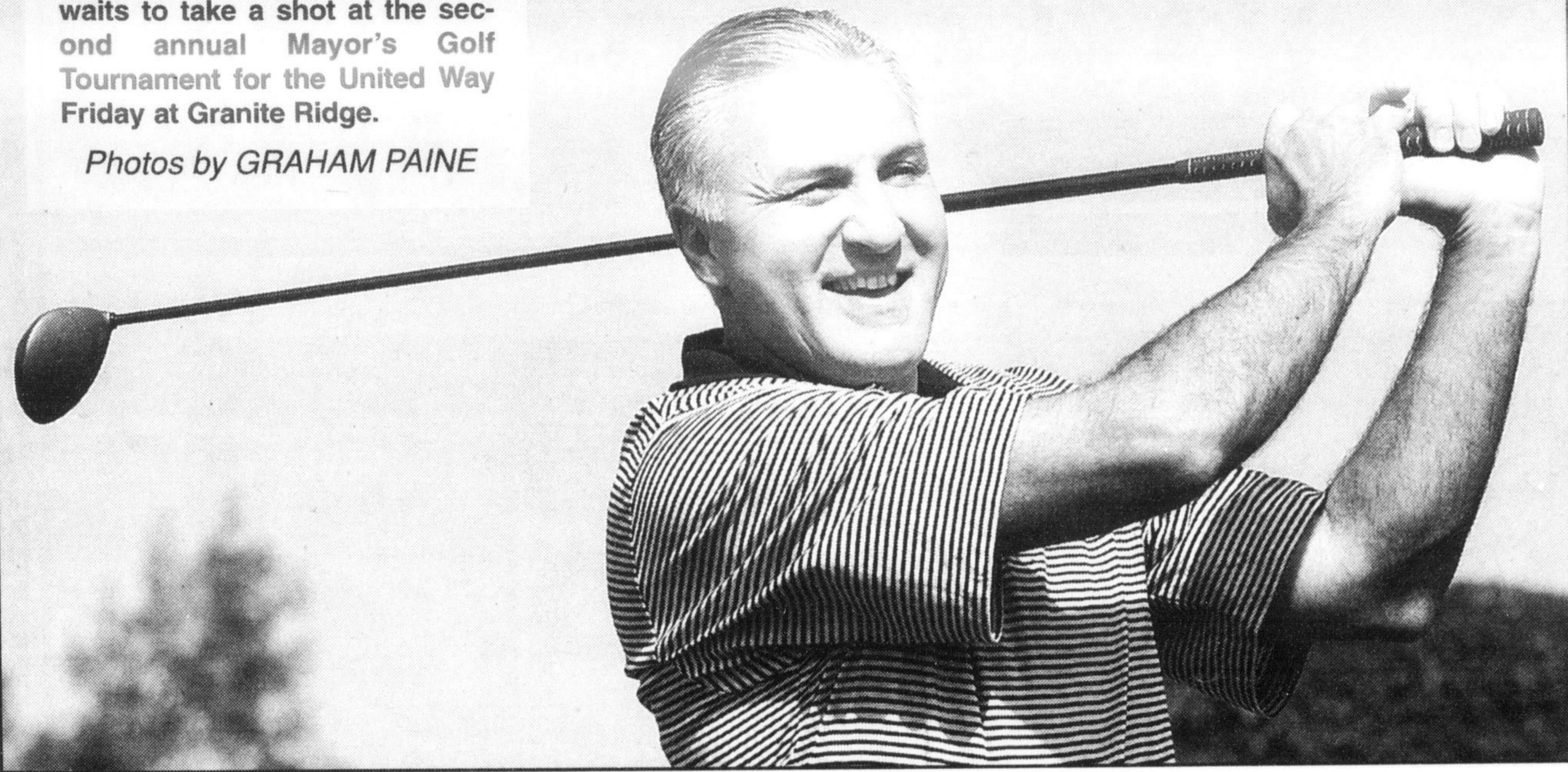


Milton native John Tonelli delivers a drive and then (inset) waits to take a shot at the second annual Mayor's Golf Tournament for the United Way Friday at Granite Ridge.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



Tonelli pauses for a little reflection during latest Milton homecoming

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

February 24, 2002 marked a banner day for North American hockey fans.

It also made for some mixed emotions and good-natured ribbing in John Tonelli's New York homestead.

With loyalties lying on both sides of the border, the Milton native and four-time Stanley Cup champion admits his support swayed at times during the Canada-U.S. Olympic gold-medal clash in Salt Lake City, Utah.

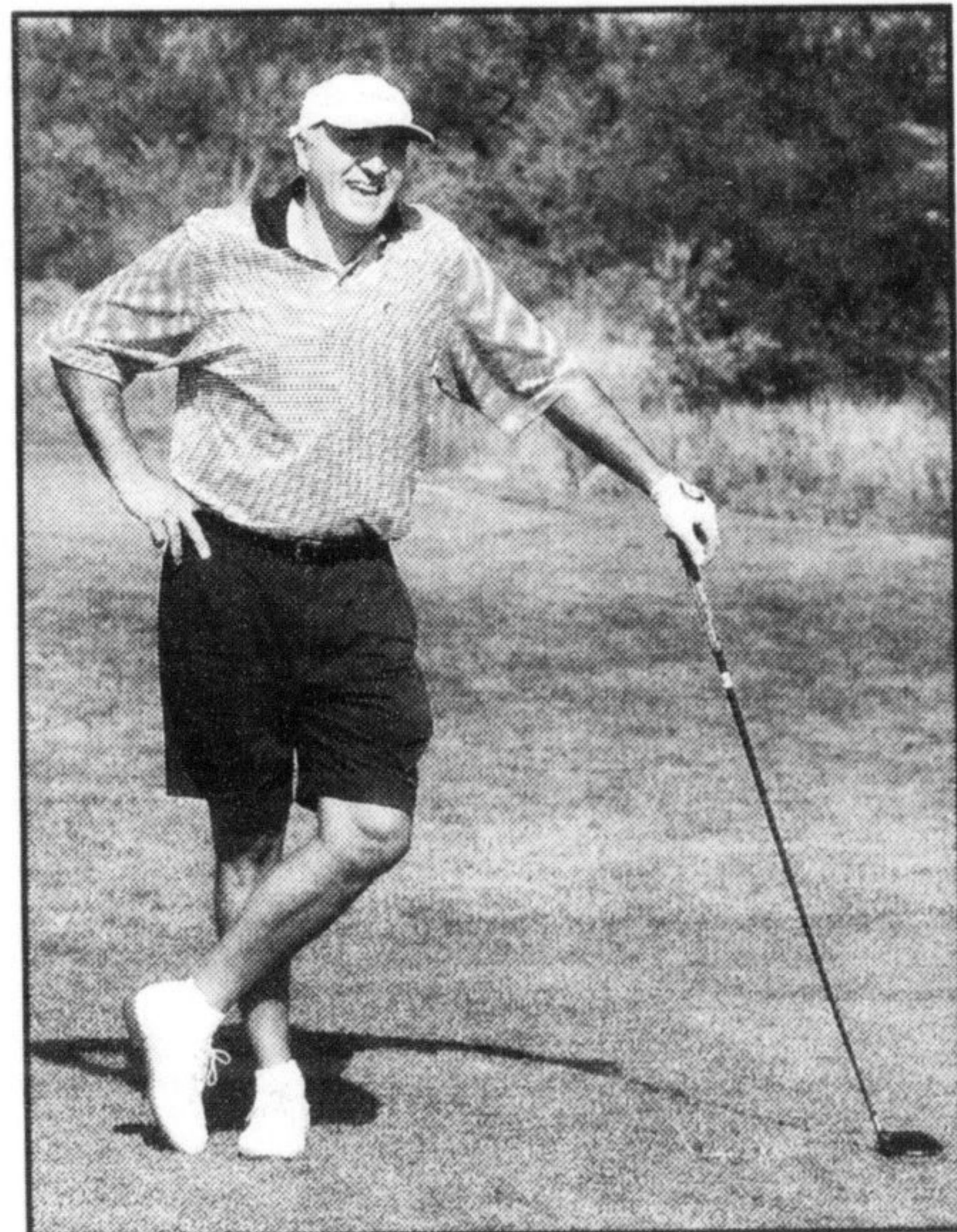
But it wasn't long before routing was reserved solely for the eventually-triumphant Canadians.

"My wife's American and I live in New York, so I took a bit of teasing during the game as she saw me leaning toward Canada. But it was all in fun," quipped the former New York Islander Thursday afternoon during his latest homecoming, which included an appearance in the second annual Mayor's Golf Tournament for the United Way Friday.

Just two months later the ex-NHL great was back in front of the tube watching fellow Milton native turned Islander Steve Webb push the Toronto Maple Leafs to the limit in a last-man-standing first-round war.

"It felt great, I'm a big fan of his (Webb)," said Tonelli.

While a much different type of player



than Webb, Tonelli says the 26-year-old agitator has a great work ethic and that the two are linked in at least one respect.

"They used to say the same thing about me," Tonelli said with regard to frequently documented predictions that Webb will never find a long-term home in the NHL. "But Webby's got one of those big hearts that makes him valuable."

Long Island bantam teams no doubt feel the same way about Tonelli — but more so for his coaching skills.

Despite a rather short-lived tenure behind the bench, the former Canada Cup

player led clubs to two state championships and one national title in 1996.

Recalled Tonelli, "It was very rewarding. With my background I had some information I could pass along and the kids are still listening. It felt good being able to relate my experiences to them."

However, his brief coaching stint was also met with some distressing trips to his native Canada — where intimidation and competition often went hand-in-hand.

"I was a little surprised by the lack of concentration of the skills and more emphasis being placed on intimidation. It was a little disturbing at times that players were more interested in beating down the other guy than in putting the puck in the net," he said, adding that he'd hate to make a broad generalization about Canadian minor hockey.

"These kids have dreams of getting to the big leagues, but that doesn't mean you have to beat the other guy up."

As for the NHL, Tonelli said he's got no qualms with today's players making the big bucks — stressing that professional hockey is an incredible grind — but that a happy medium must be found to avoid heading in the same dangerous direction as Major League Baseball.

"You have to have a situation where all three sides are satisfied — the players, the owners and especially the fans."

Golfers needed for upcoming deaf hockey team tournament

Milton's deaf hockey players are hoping to defend their world championship next spring in Sweden.

But first they'll need a financial assist from the community, which can support their upcoming excursion by signing up for the Canadian National Deaf Ice Hockey Team's charity golf tournament at Granite Ridge Golf Club September 26.

This inaugural event is in memory of John Guirestante — a prominent member of the 1999 Canadian deaf hockey team, and former New Jersey Devil hopeful, who died of pneumonia last fall.

Walter Gretzky will be the guest speaker at the tournament, while also on hand will be ex-NHL great Johnny Bower.

The day will start with a lunch and 1 p.m. shotgun start, followed by a dinner, silent auction and prize presentation. Proceeds from the event will go toward the travel expenses for the national team, which include at least two Miltonians — Chad Broussard and Marc Couture. The duo were part of Canada's 1999 gold-medal victory in Switzerland.

A number of other local players will have one last shot at making the team at a final tryout in the fall.

Anyone wishing to sign up for the tournament or become a sponsor is asked to call organizer Norm Brownell at (905) 878-0752, or e-mail him at nbrownell@cogeco.ca.

Mini ready for test

• from HAYDAR on page 21

Though he now stands on the threshold of the NHL, Milton's most prolific goal scorer says he doesn't really feel any additional pressure compared to the other big tests he's faced in recent memory.

"Basically I'm going in with the same attitude that I did in university, just to take it one step at a time," stressed the 5'9", 170-pounder.

"I'm treating this season as a learning experience. I'm going to make baby steps and build for the future."

While the Predators have their share of younger forwards at both centre and right wing, Haydar feels he's got as good or better a chance of making the team as any other in the NHL.

"It's just a case of where I find a spot — being the right piece of the puzzle," said Haydar.

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