



SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 19, 2002

Merchants dismantle weekend opposition

Milton riding six-game win streak and threatening to take over first

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

Short on bodies, long on production. That was pretty much the story for the Merchants this past weekend, as they delivered a couple of lopsided victories to close out the first half of their season at an impressive 19-5-1.

While going with just three lines, Milton steamrolled past both Burlington Friday night and Bramalea Sunday afternoon to pull within two points of top-seated Hamilton.

The Merchants currently ride a six-game winning streak, their second since returning from the Compuware Fall Classic Tournament in mid-October.

Needless to say, they've surpassed first-half expectations — which weren't especially high considering there are so many new players in the lineup coming from a myriad of hockey levels.

"If you'd said 19-5-1 in September, I would have said no. We've never had a start like this," said general manager David Brown, comparing the 2002/03 Merchants' first half to those of his old stomping ground of Brampton.

"This team works hard. They're young and they don't know enough to be intimidated by teams like Georgetown. They just play hockey."

Added head coach Mario Cicchillo, "We've gotten better since day one, especially with passing and positional play."

While presently sporting the best goals-against average in the Western Conference, Milton's firepower was the big story over the weekend — particularly at home against Bramalea Sunday.

While captain Craig Macdonald's personal absence left the team without one of its more dependable snipers, the Merchants hit double digits for the second time in as many games with the hapless Blues — annihilating them 10-1.

Back-up Alex Evans faced just 15 shots — with a shorthanded slapper early in the

third period spoiling his shutout bid — while leading offensively with three goals and two assists was newcomer Ryan Silveria.

Wes Clark, James Duhamel and Rob Ricci all had a goal and two helpers each. Also lighting the lamp were Pat Lee and team scoring leader Rich Meloche — who pushed his goal and point totals to 23 and 49 respectively.

Bramalea, not nearly as well coached or conditioned as last season, offered minimal resistance from start to finish.

In Burlington Friday, Milton gave one of its better performances of the year against an upper-echelon team and systematically dismantled the Cougars 8-3.

Phil Sbrocchi's return to the blueline and a gritty effort by the Lee, Silveria, Jon Ornelas unit highlighted the road trip — which saw the visitors enjoy 2-1 and 5-2 period leads en route to victory.

The Merchants answered back quickly after each goal against and bucked one of their less positive trends with a production three-goal second period.

Rapidly-improving freshman Vic Oreskovich tallied twice while other multi-point nights were posted by Lee, Macdonald, Meloche and Rick Janco.

Cody Spicer battled gamely between the pipes, turning back 18 shots to deliver his 13th season win and keep his goals-against average under 3.00.

Merchant notes: Sean Kennedy will be back in December and is expected to return to his natural position of defense ... In addition to Sbrocchi, Lee Swallow was also activated from the injury list this past weekend ... The Merchants will hold a holiday food drive during their next two Friday night games. Fans are asked to bring a non-perishable food item to the game ... Milton has just one game over the next week-and-a-half, which is slated for this Friday at home against Mississauga at 7:30 p.m.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton Merchants swarm the Bramalea net during Sunday afternoon action at Memorial Arena. Milton bombed their guests 10-1 to cap a thoroughly dominating weekend.

Haydar makes NHL debut

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

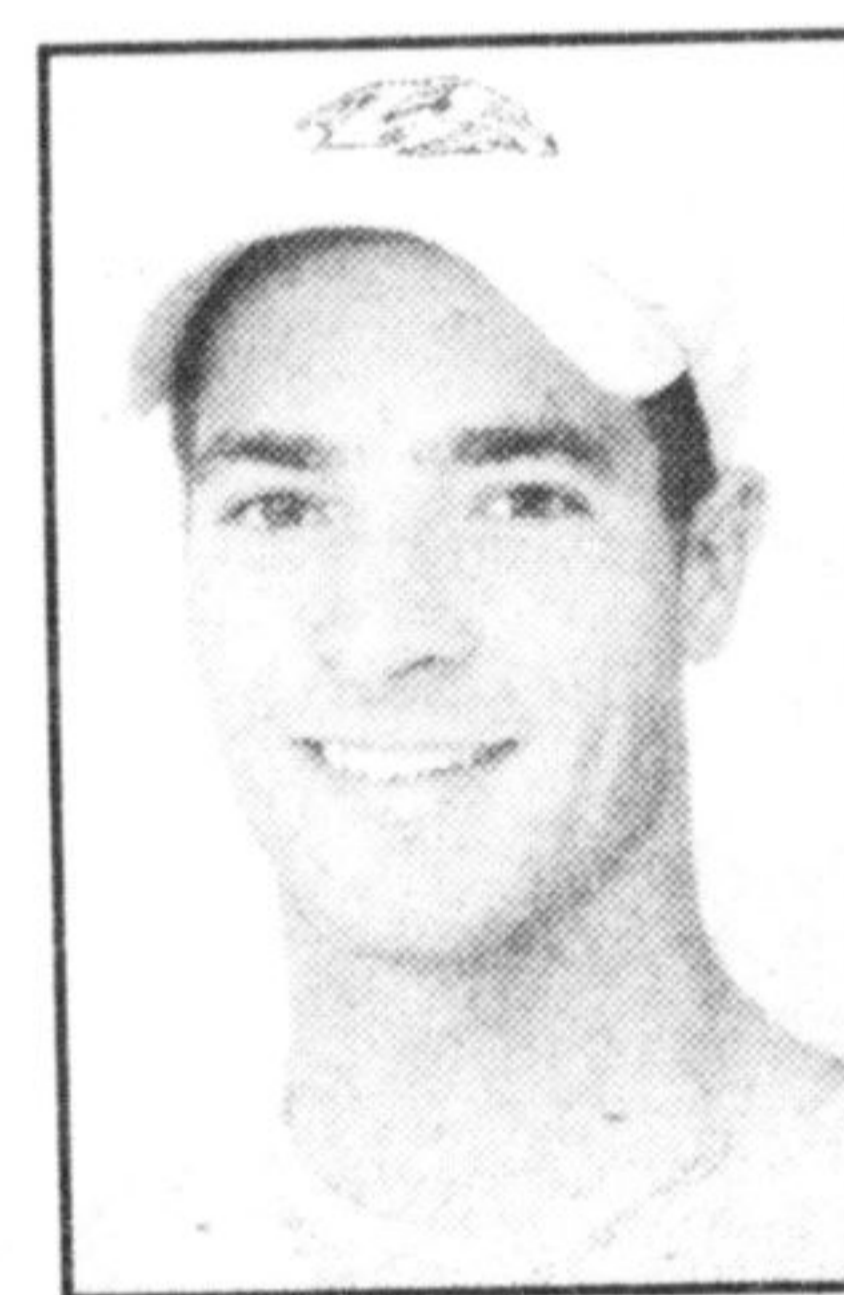
Darren Haydar had played four games in the past five days when he laced up his skates in Chicago Sunday evening.

But any fatigue from the hectic week was buried under a mass of adrenaline — as Milton's 23-year-old star sniper hit the ice at the United Center with the Nashville Predators.

"It didn't matter how many games I played last week, I was going to be up for that one," said Haydar of his NHL debut, which came just two months after signing with the Predators. "It was definitely exciting and gave me a lot of confidence."

As it happened, father Frank Haydar was in Aruba this past weekend when word of his youngest son's NHL call-up came. He caught a flight back just in time to catch the game on satellite TV.

"It was a thrill (to see him play). We didn't know he was actually going to dress until we turned on the television and saw him," said Frank. "I didn't talk to him



Darren Haydar

before but our other son Ryan said he was like a kid in a candy store."

Haydar — who at the time of his promotion was tied for second in AHL scoring with 10 goals and 10 assists in 15 games with Milwaukee — played about 14 minutes against Chicago Sunday, and was used on the powerplay as well as at even strength.

Called up with Saskatchewan native Greg Classen, Milton's most prolific scorer registered a shot on net and weathered a third-period check from Blackhawks defenceman Steve Poapst. "I was just a little wobbly. I

had a slight concussion, but was cleared to play," said Haydar, who wore jersey #54 with the Predators.

Unfortunately, his NHL debut wasn't marked with victory — as ailing Nashville was beat 4-2. Haydar was sent back to Milwaukee yesterday, but was told that he may be called up again for the Predators' game in Colorado Thursday.

"I still need to learn the ropes at the minor level, but a few more games here and there would definitely help my confidence," he said.



Thanks to
The Dickens
for supporting
us



MILTON VS MISSISSAUGA
Friday, November 22 @ 7:30pm

Game is at Memorial Arena - Thompson Road

DOOR PRIZES, DRAWS AND GIVEAWAYS

The Dickens's

A great place to go after the game!

**Book your
Christmas
parties now**

**Go
Merchants!
Go!**

189 Mill Street 878-6680

Christmas Food Drive

Please bring your non-perishable food items to our Nov 22nd and Nov 29th Friday Night Home Games.

TICKET PRICES

Adults	\$8.00
Seniors/Students	\$5.00
Children 12 & Under	...	\$3.00